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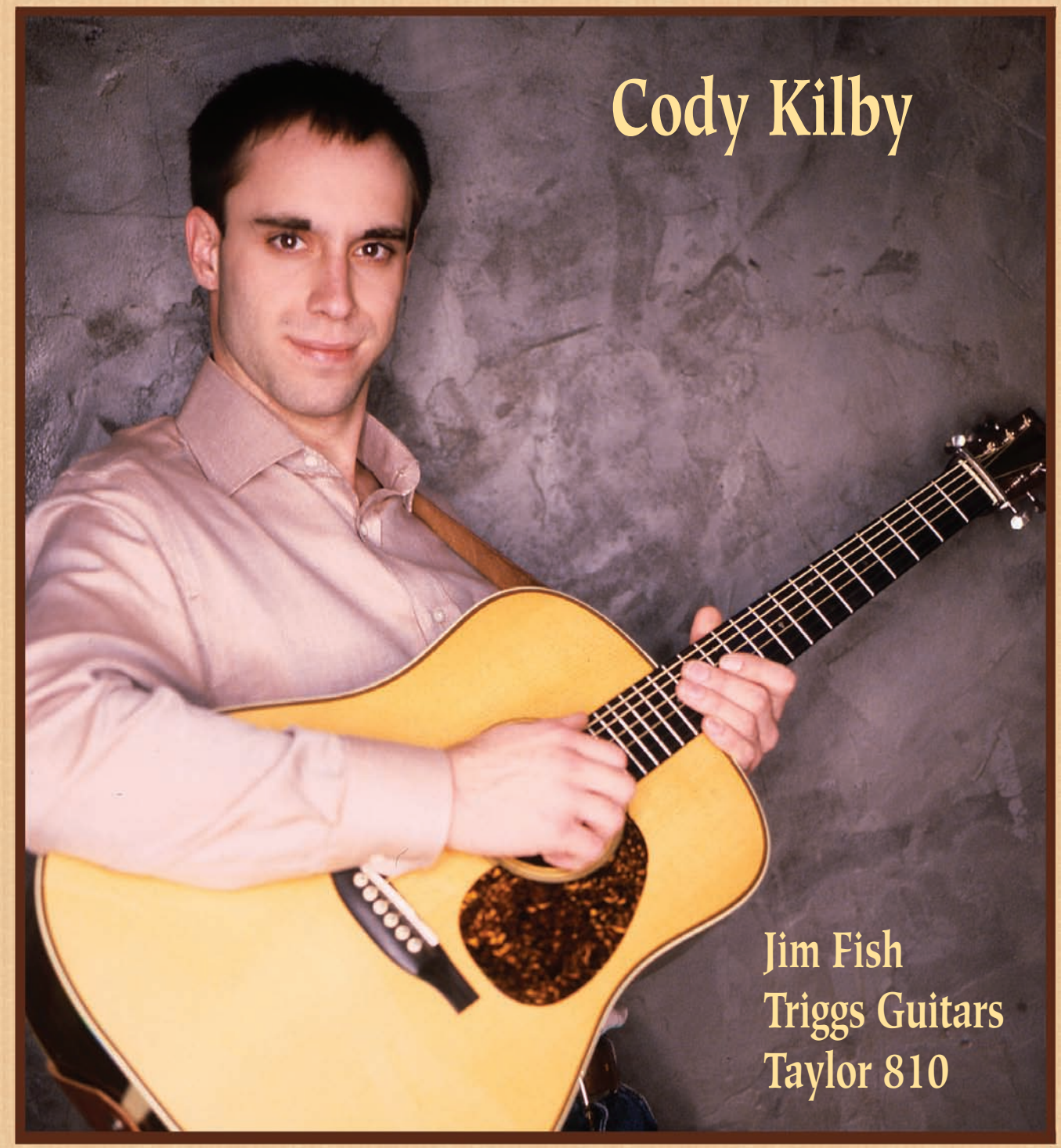
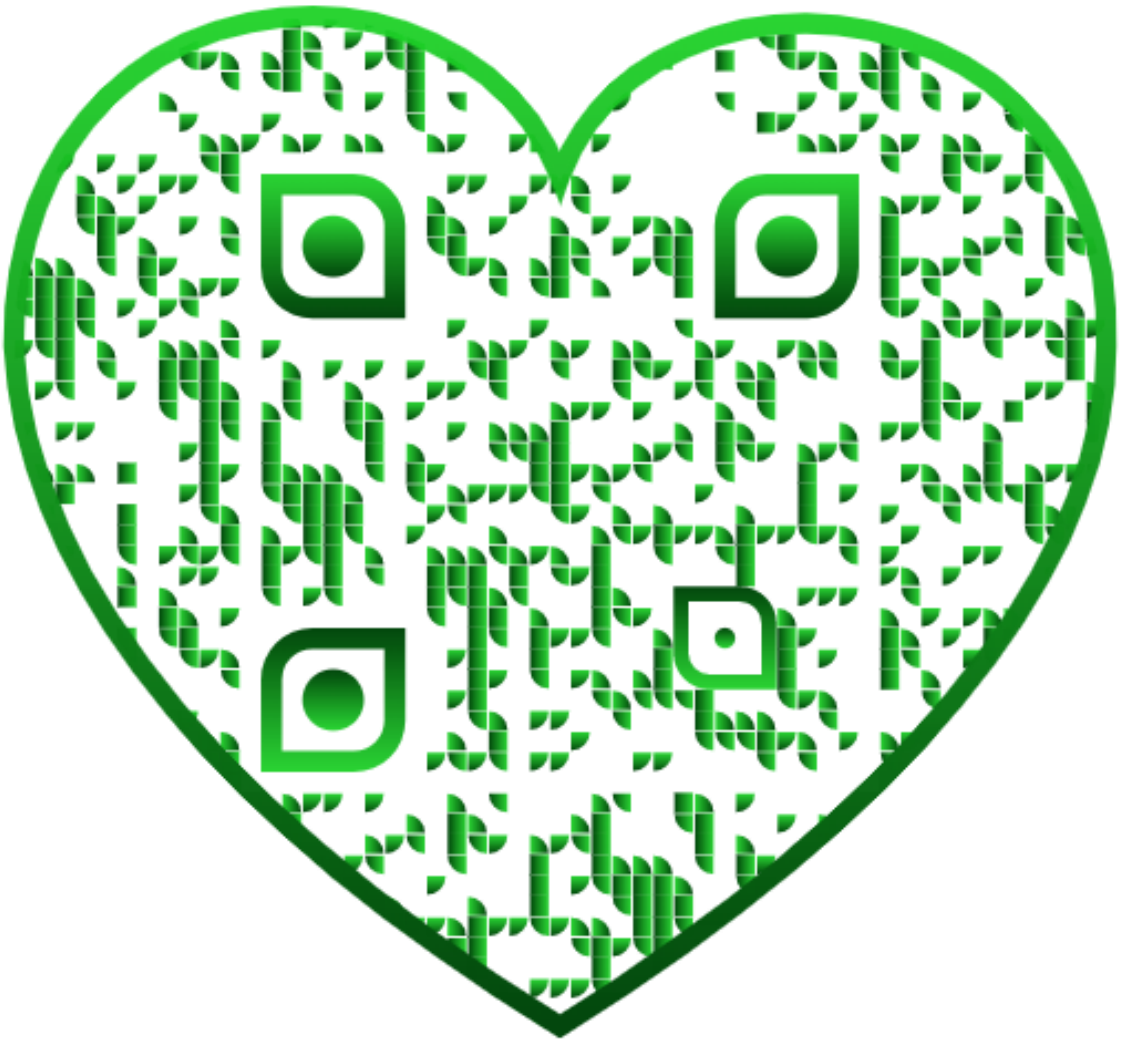
Flatpicking Guitar Magazine

Volume 7, Number 4 May/June 2003





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EDITOR'S PAGE

Brad Davis joins Sam Bush

Flatpicking Guitar Magazine columnist Brad Davis, who spent 11 years on the road with country star Marty Stuart and currently plays lead acoustic and electric guitar with Billy Bob Thornton's rock band and the Earl Scruggs & Friends bluegrass band has recently been hired on as the lead guitar player for the Sam Bush Band. Brad's first tour with Sam was in late March of 2003.

Brad's new job with Sam Bush follows the release of his solo project *I'm Not Gonna Let My Blues Get Me Down*. The cut "Old Number Nine," on which Brad and Sam play together, is currently being featured on bluegrass radio stations worldwide.

While out on the road with Sam this summer, Brad will be conducting a series of guitar workshops and clinics at various music stores. Check www.fgmrecords.com for Brad's updated workshop schedule.

New Releases from FGM Records

FGM Records has recently released three new CDs, all featuring *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine* columnists. The first release, *The Big Top*, is an excellent singer-songwriter project in the folk music genre featuring the singing and songwriting talents of Geoffrey Rutledge. Geoffrey is FGM columnist John Tindel's partner in the band RST. On this, Geoffrey's second solo project, John Tindel provides excellent flatpicking guitar work throughout.

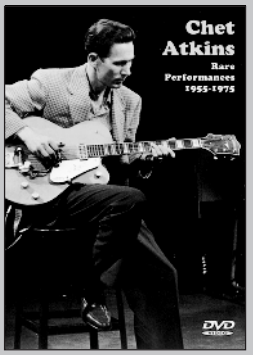
The second release, which came out in early March is a new brother-duet style project from Jim Nunally and Dix Bruce. Jim and Dix sing and pick on a lot of classic bluegrass tunes. The guitar work here is superb, as you might expect. If you are looking to listen to and/or learn some great solos to classic vocal tunes, check out Jim and Dix's newest release. Dix has tabbed out both his and Jim's solos to "Dark Hollow" in this issue.

Release number three came out at the end of April and is the long awaited John Carlini Quartet project, featuring Don Stiernberg on mandolin and special guest Pat Cloud on banjo. This is a wonderful acoustic jazz project by one of the greatest acoustic jazz players in the country. The liner notes were written by Tony Rice. If you are a jazz fan, you will not want to miss this one.

Other projects that we are currently working on include an old-time project featuring Robin and Dan Kessinger and a live concert performance DVD with Jim Hurst, Tim Stafford, and Bryan Sutton. Stay tuned!

Correction

In the last issue the author of the CD Highlight article on Eddie Collins was listed as Dan Miller. Chris Thiessen actually wrote that article. Sorry for the misprint Chris!



Chet Atkins
Rare Performances 1955-1975
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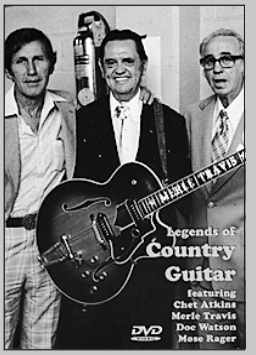

Legends of Country Guitar
Atkins/Travis/Rager/Watson
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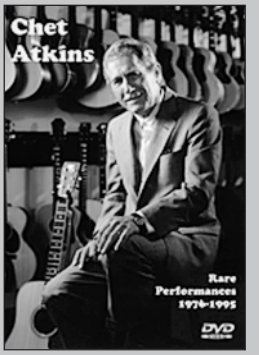

Chet Atkins
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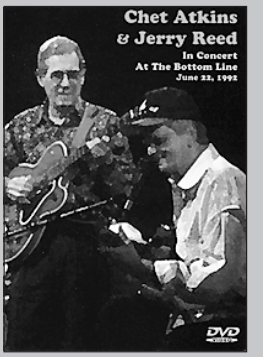

Chet Atkins & Jerry Reed
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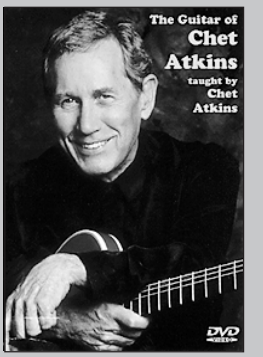

The Guitar of Chet Atkins
Taught by Chet Atkins
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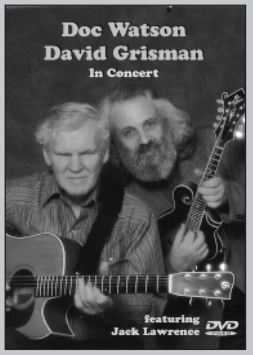

Doc Watson & David Grisman
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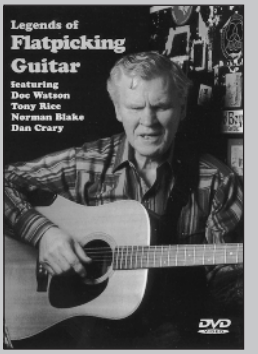

Legends of Flatpicking Guitar
Watson/Rice/Blake/Crary
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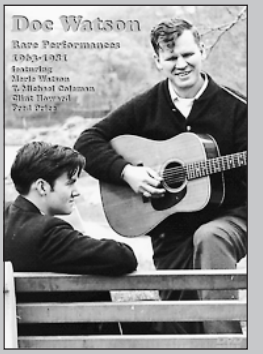

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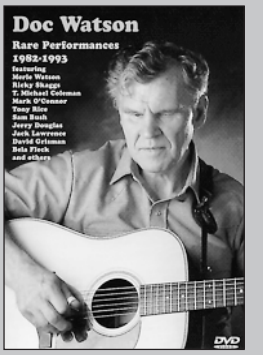

Doc Watson
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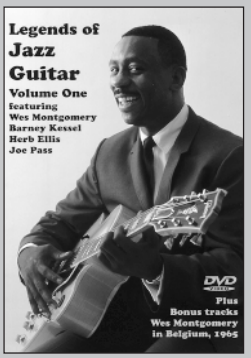

Legends of Jazz Guitar #1
Montgomery/Pass/Kessel/Ellis
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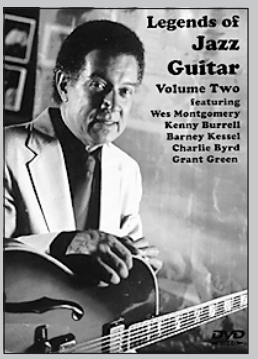

Legends of Jazz Guitar #2
Montgomery/Kessel/Burrell...
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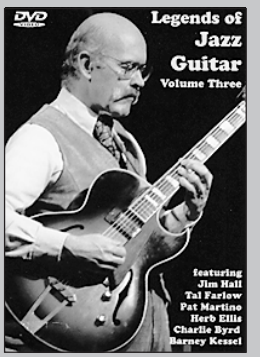

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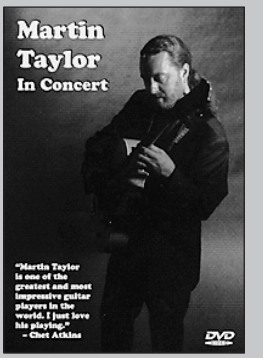

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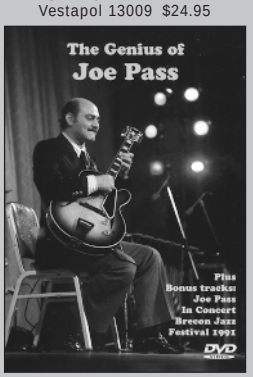

The Genius of Joe Pass
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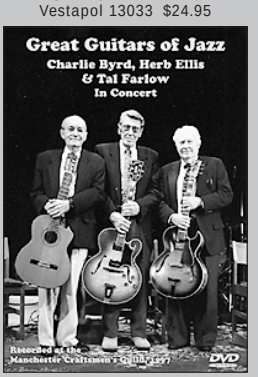

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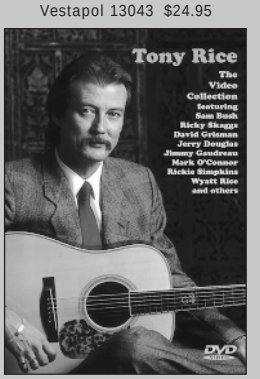

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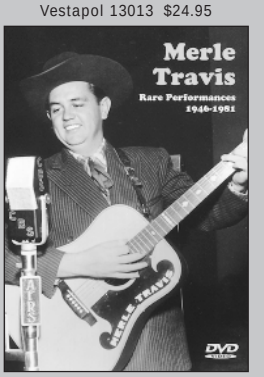

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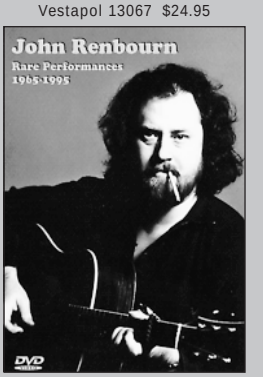

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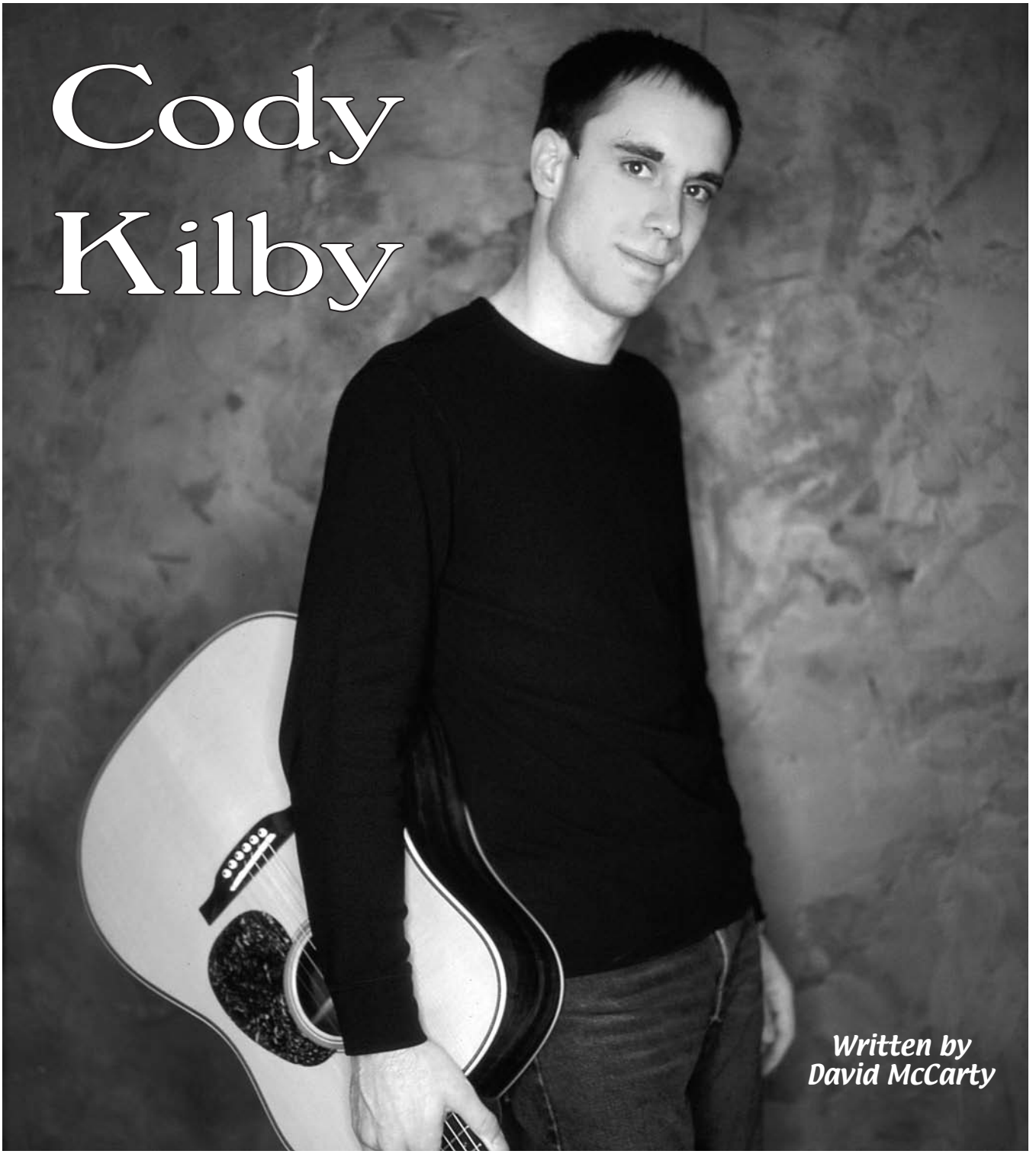
Cody Kilby



Written by David McCarty

It's tough walking on stage to compete at the National Flatpicking Championships in Winfield, Kansas. Hundreds of the most knowledgeable flatpicking fans in the world sit in judgment, waiting like buzzards for the moment when a contestant will crash and burn, ending up as roadkill on the contest superhighway. But Winfield turned Cody Kilby from a banjo prodigy into a serious guitarist who today holds perhaps the most public and prestigious flatpicking guitar job in the world as lead guitarist with Ricky's Skaggs' plasma-hot bluegrass revival band Kentucky Thunder.

Cody was a mere 15-year-old kid who hadn't started shaving when he first walked up on the contest stage at Winfield. He'd made the long haul from Tennessee to Kansas to enter the National Banjo Championships, which Winfield conveniently holds at 9 a.m. Sunday morning so every serious banjo player has to skip the all-night Saturday jams in order to be awake and coherent enough to compete. For Cody Kilby, entering the flatpicking contest was more about being there than being prepared to do well.

Then a funny thing happened. He did better on guitar, which until then had been one of his "second" instruments like mandolin and Dobro®, than he did on banjo, which was his main instrument at

the time. The light bulb was nearly blinding when it went off.

"When I did better on guitar than on banjo," he recalls, "it kind of made me see that on guitar you can do so many different sounds and play so many kinds of music compared to banjo." (Please hold your applause.)

Doing so well in such a prestigious guitar contest, he adds, "Was a big dream for my dad. He was amazed and surprised I did so well, and it became a dream for him for me to go back and win it one day. It pushed me to practice guitar more than the banjo."

Ronnie Kilby had always supported his son's musical ambitions. Ronnie, who with his wife Sharon co-owns a small grocery store in Cowan, TN, had won a banjo in a contest and took lessons for a month but gave it up to his son when at age eight Cody began showing the interest and aptitude to play. By ten, Cody had started on guitar, and on mandolin and Dobro at age eleven. He devoured the Flatt & Scruggs records he found at home, becoming a devoted Scruggs fan. He tuned in WSM and TNN and Hee Haw and the Opry at every opportunity. He endured the mild ribbing he took from his schoolmates who looked at his bluegrass obsession as a mild eccentricity, avoiding the fate of his equally talented sister who gave up fiddle because of peer pressure from her friends who wanted her to do more girl-oriented activities. Cody was different. He wanted to pick.

He made a deal with his dad: "When I wanted to start playing guitar, he said he would buy me any instrument I wanted to try, but made me promise I would play it at least an hour a day. I had to stick to it." So he'd come home from school and after doing his homework, he'd practice.

He started performing in his parent's store, getting a reputation as the young local boy who could burn up a banjo and tear down a guitar. "People would come in to hear me," he says, remembering his first "public" performances. Soon, he was racing through the local contest scene. "That kept me going, hearing other players and hearing the music," he reports. "I did that about every weekend from age nine through thirteen."

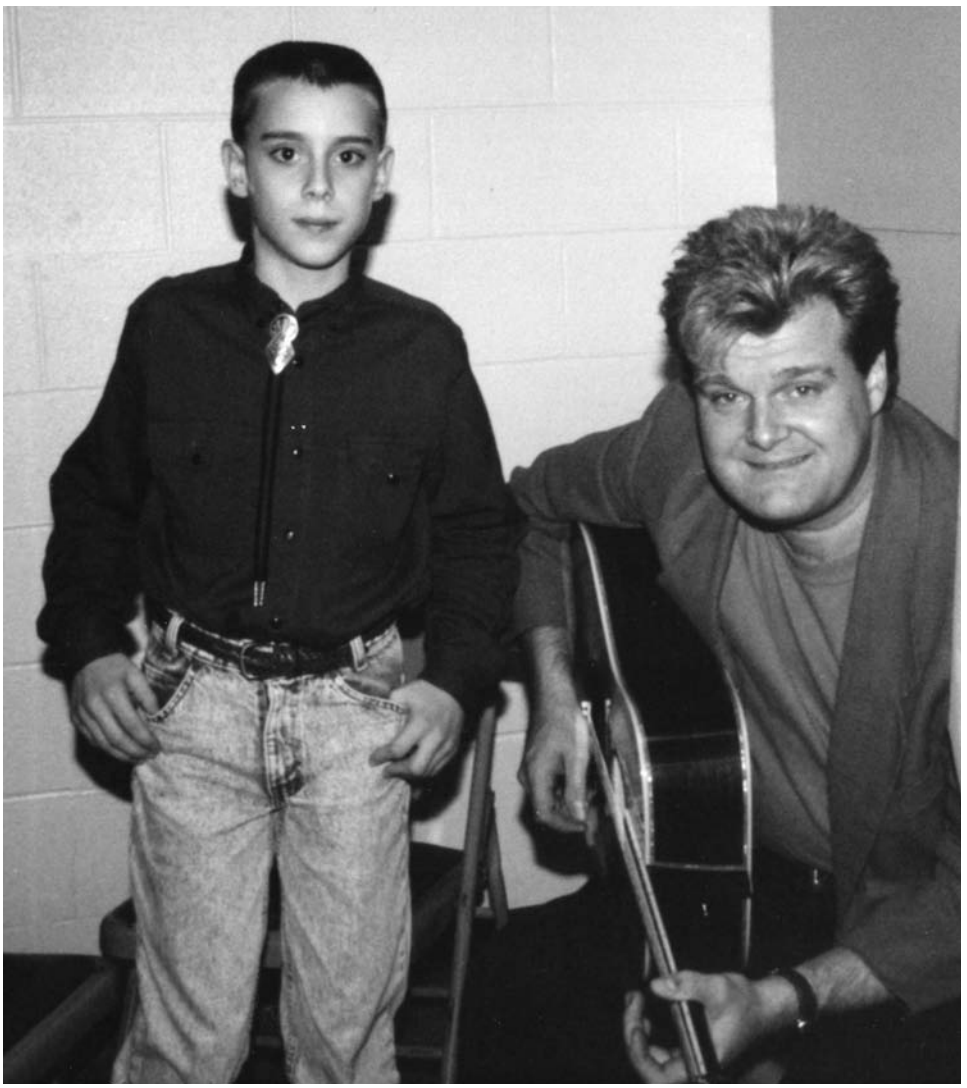
Soon, he was winning banjo contests, earning a name as a strong, skilled player. "I was known for entering four categories (banjo, guitar, mandolin and Dobro) and doing good in all of them," he says now of his growing reputation. His other love was basketball, but when push came to shove, he chose picking over setting picks.

Before long, his obvious talents drew the attention of the music world. He had a Gibson banjo endorsement deal when he was eleven and on his 12th birthday played the Grand Ole Opry. He met banjo legend Pete Wernick, who had seen him on TNN's popular Crook & Chase TV talk show. Dr. Banjo gave the young upstart a banjo scholarship to his camp at Merlefest and wound up including the multi-talented kid in his Youth Bluegrass All-Stars at IBMA. "Pete took me under his wing and helped me along," Cody says.

He soon landed a paying gig with the Nashville Music Review, where he played electric guitar and gigged at county fairs, churches and other small venues. "Once I had that job and was making decent money, I talked about it with Mom and Dad," he explains. "They still wanted me to go to college, but I knew I could land a job in music and do okay. I wanted to be on the road and see the world."

He worked for a while in the country showplace Mecca of Branson, Mo., but soon tired of the crass country music and being rooted to one gig in one place for so long. An opening with Tim Graves and Cherokee gave him the chance to tour, not on guitar but on mandolin. Following that, he landed a prestigious spot with Sally Jones, the talented wife of flatpicking superstar and FGM columnist Chris Jones. But again, he was playing mandolin, not guitar.

By now, Cody was 18 and a seasoned veteran bluegrass road warrior. He enjoyed working on mandolin, but longed to make his mark on guitar. Then came the call from Ricky Skaggs' manager saying they wanted to audition him for Kentucky Thunder.



A young Cody Kilby with his future boss Ricky Skaggs

When Cody was 11 he signed an endorsement deal with Gibson at Earl Scruggs' home

"Ricky wanted me to come to the Opry and meet with him, and I did that," Cody recalls. "It turns out, the show I went to was when Clay Hess was trying out for the job." The fleet-fingered Hess, of course, scored the gig and replaced Bryan Sutton, touring with Skaggs for 16 months. But when Hess turned in his notice, Skaggs again called young Cody Kilby. After clearing his possible departure with his boss, Sally Jones, Cody filled in for Clay on a couple of Kentucky Thunder gigs and was handed the prestigious job when Clay left to pursue his own interests musically and personally.

So was it intimidating for Cody to fill in for players with such big-time reputations as Sutton and Hess? "It was," he admits, but adds that the real challenge was something of a surprise to him. "The lead stuff I played was easier than the rhythm stuff, because I could play my speedy contest-style stuff. But my arm was just worn out playing the rhythm stuff," he confirms. Over the first few months with the band, Cody worked with Ricky to better understand the fine points of playing bluegrass rhythm guitar in a band with such stellar instrumentalists as banjo player Jim Mills and fiddler Bobby Hicks.

"It took me like 3-4 months to get comfortable. Ricky sat down with me and taped stuff here and there on what he wanted on the rhythm stuff. For all the banjo playing I've done, it was kind of funny that I didn't know much about how to play rhythm guitar with a banjo. He taught me how to listen. He taught me how to really do a G-run and where to put it in and how to work with Jim [Mills] and get my walking bass runs to work with the banjo more. Once I realized what he was talking about, it became natural since I had played so much banjo," Cody explains, adding that his new boss never dictated what he wanted during his guitar solos. "He's always been really open to what I do on-stage. The first time I knew I was out on tour with Ricky, I asked him if he wanted my solos to sound like the album, and he said no, you play what you feel. This is a tryout, so show me what you're all about."

Now that he's established himself at Skaggs' "stunt guitarist" (in Frank Zappa's immortal description), Cody Kilby no longer worries about establishing himself as a flatpicker of the first tier. He's becoming a top demo session guitarist, familiarizing himself with the Nashville numbers system and learning how to work efficiently in the studio. He's working on a follow-up to his successful solo CD, *Just Me*. The new project, as yet untitled and unsigned, will include such bluegrass superstars as Rhonda Vincent and Sally Jones, Barry Bales, Stuart Duncan, Jim Mills and Chris Thile. "It'll probably be out before this fall." he explains.

Although Cody is known for playing the Collings D2H he won at Winfield, Dana Bourgeois asked Cody if he'd like to try a Bourgeois Vintage D after the guitarmaker saw him play a show in New York. The first guitar, an Indian rosewood model, was nice, but it wasn't what Cody was looking for in terms of tone. "Then they sent me a Brazilian and I fell in love with it the day I got it. It has a great neck and a great balanced sound," he explains.

An endorser of Elixir® strings, he uses medium Nanowebs and the 1.0 mm white Clayton picks. His capo is a Bill Stokes Showcase. His Bourgeois is equipped with an L.R. Baggs active I-Beam pickup, which he controls with a volume pedal on-stage. Kentucky Thunder's soundman blends that signal with a Shure KSM32 to achieve a natural, focused guitar sound for their performances.

During his contest days, Cody would practice at least an hour a day (had to keep that promise to his father!), dividing his time between scales and technical exercises and developing and rehearsing his contest arrangements. Today, he says, he rarely does such formal practicing, preferring to write tunes and develop his technique by working with a Windows-based computer recording system. "I love to engineer stuff," he explains.

Like his predecessors in Kentucky Thunder, Cody has developed a deserved reputation for speedy flatpicking. Much of that, he says now, can be traced back to his early practice on banjo where he trained his left hand to move swiftly from one position to another all over the neck. "I had to retrain the right hand, but the left hand was about the same," he explains. "The biggest thing that helped me speedwise was down-down-up crosspicking. Sometimes I'd watch a movie and sit there and do that until my arm would about fall off. I'd damp the strings and I'd crosspick until I started burning, then I'd stop and then do it again."

Speed plays a big role in other parts of Cody Kilby's life, too. Off the road, you can find him riding motorcycles or four-wheeling, he says. Although he blew out his ACL playing basketball in his junior year of high school, he still enjoys playing ball and making a fast break now and then. You might even find him bowling or going to the movies or a concert. But his career in music pretty much consumes his life right now.

He's been doing more workshops, showing his brilliant chops and polished tone with fellow flatpickers at IBMA and elsewhere. He hopes to release an instructional DVD to showcase "my own ways of playing and thinking about music." As a big part of the current boom in bluegrass music, he sees a bright future for the style. "Right now, there are a lot more young people getting into this music than even when I was a kid. When I was going to festivals, I saw a lot of kids, but now there are four or five times as many playing instruments and wanting to learn to play the music," he says excitedly.

And someday, not now but eventually,

he wants to lead his own band. "I really love this gig now," he says of working with Ricky Skaggs. "I promised myself I would stay here two years, but I'll probably stay another two years or even longer. But once this album gets out, I'll do some shows around Nashville on my own when we're not on the road. So it's definitely something I want to do one day."

On the next page we provide a transcription of Cody's original tune "Old Bud." This is one of the tunes Cody has recorded for his upcoming solo project. On the audio CD that accompanies this issue Brad Davis plays rhythm guitar to Cody's lead.

David McCarty is contributing editor of Flatpicking Guitar Magazine. *Despite two top ten finishes on guitar in the 70s and a third place on mandolin in 1979, he's been too chicken to enter the contests at Winfield for years.*

Cody performing on stage with Ricky Skaggs and Kentucky Thunder

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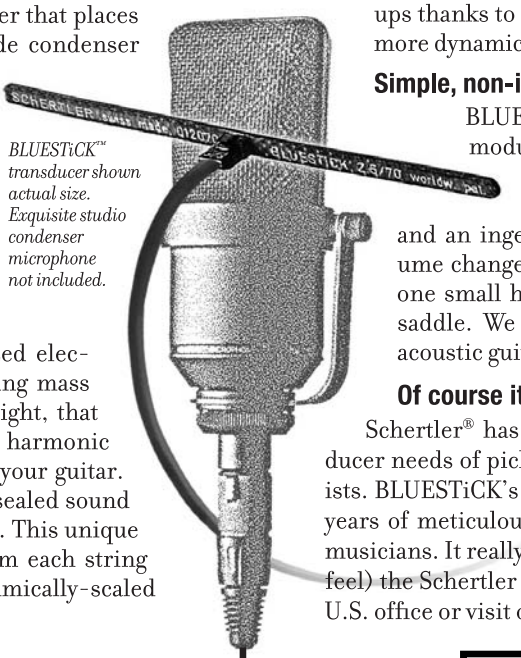

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Old Bud

Audio CD
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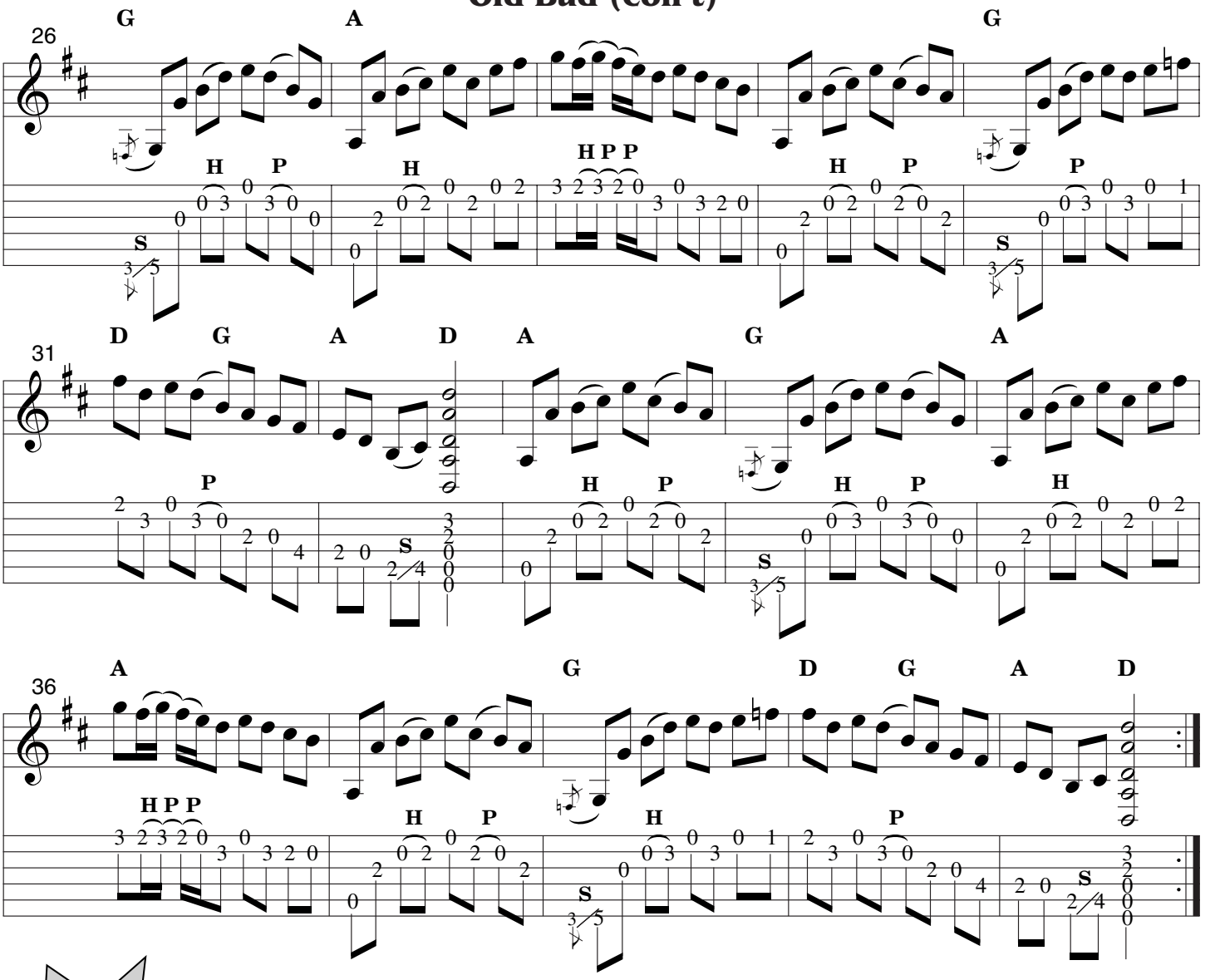
Drop D Tuning

Arranged by Cody Kilby
Transcribed by Brad Davis

Old Bud (con't)



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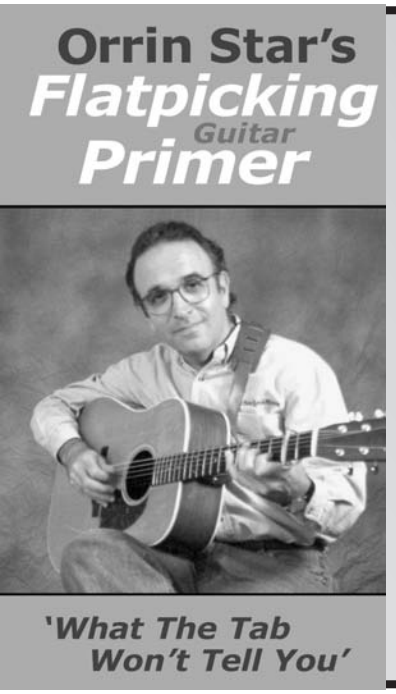

Sleep

by Craig Vance

This selection comes from the pen of Kevin McKrell, lead singer of the band that I've been with for the past 12 years. We recorded "Sleep" on our latest release, *Hit the Ground Running*. You can obtain a copy of this CD—and other McKrells recordings—by visiting our site (www.mckrells.com). "Sleep" is also featured on *Flatpicking 2002*, available through the Flatpicking Mercantile (www.flatpickingmercantile.com).

The solo for this tune (which appears on the audio CD accompanying this issue) is pretty much a free-style improvisation pulled from a library of licks I've filed away mentally over the years. There's really no other way to explain what went on here: I just chose the particular licks off the top of my head and liked the way they fell into place. Put the ol' capo on the fourth fret and let your fingers do the talking.

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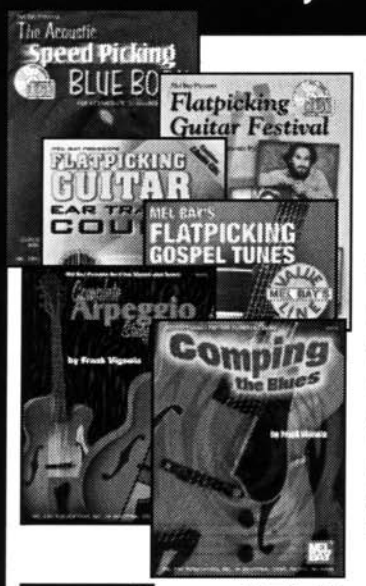

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Sleep

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Capo 4

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Beginner's Page

by Dan Huckabee

"Where The Soul Of Man Never Dies": A Foundation in Solo Development

"Where The Soul Of Man Never Dies" is a beautiful old bluegrass gospel standard. If you've read my column in the past you know that a song has to meet several criteria for me to include it. It's got to be a nice song, a good example to help you with other songs, ideal to illustrate a point or several points, and it's got to be a song that might pop up at a get-together sometime.

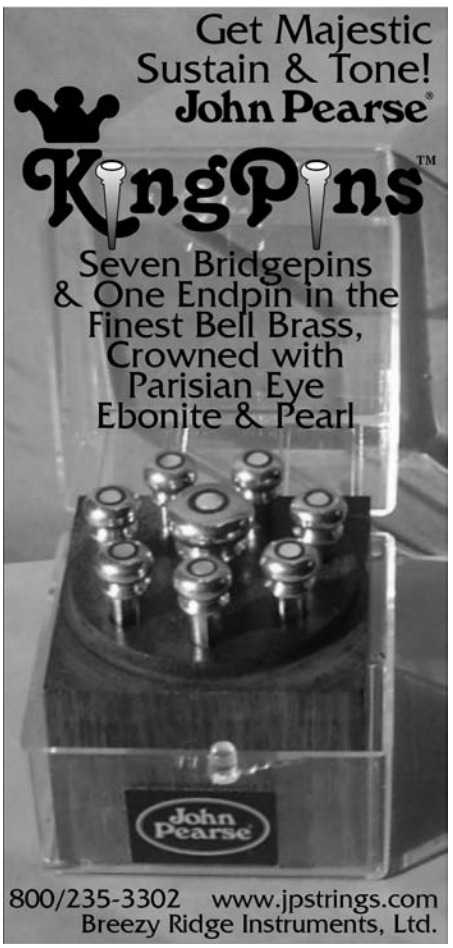
This version is in the key of C. You may personally know a guitar player who really knows his way around G but hasn't spent much time getting well-versed in other keys. There's nothing wrong with spending a lot of time mastering G, but it's also important to widen your skills to other keys, and C is the second-most popular key for the flatpicker.

We're going to learn "Soul of Man" in the Carter Family style. If you're not familiar with this style, it simply combines lead and rhythm by inserting melody notes at the appropriate places as you strum the chords to the song. This makes you two players at once. By combining rhythm and lead you're actually playing what is referred to as "chord solo guitar" or "solo guitar" (meaning guitar that is played alone rather than with someone backing you up playing the chords).

There's an entirely separate and very important reason for today's column: learning a tune in the Carter Family Style is the absolute essential first step in developing a professional flatpicking solo. The Dutch artist Rembrandt always created several practice drawings and ink-washes ("studies") before he actually got out the paint for the real piece of work. This was true of all the classical painters. But why learn an easy "children's version" of a bluegrass song before we start work on our hot show-off version? Because the simpler version lays the foundational relationship between the melody and the chord structure that fits it. I'm suggesting that Rembrandt's paintings would have been a mess if he hadn't taken the time to first create several studies before slapping paint on stretched canvas. In other words, even the advanced flatpicker should first learn a Carter Family version of every song he learns before he starts assembling the Tony Rice hot licks.

We have two courses that we've just transferred to DVD that deal with this subject: *Creating Guitar Solos for Bluegrass Songs* with Chris Jones and *Easy Gospel Guitar Solos* with Dan Huckabee. So after you've learned this one, give us a call (800-543-6125) or drop by the website (www.musicians-workshop.com) and we'll help you move in the direction of flatpicking fluency.

Learn something new every day and we'll see you next issue.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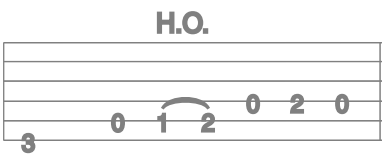

by Joe Carr

Playing Rhythm on Flatpicking Standards

Steve Carr (no relation) maintains a great website (www.bluegrassguitar.com) that encourages visitors to the site to vote for their favorite flatpicking tunes. Although the list order changes some over time, the same top ten have been on the list a long time. As of this writing, the list is:

#10 Billy In The Lowground
#9 Beaumont Rag
#8 Gold Rush
#7 Wildwood Flower
#6 Soldier's Joy
#5 Whiskey Before Breakfast
#4 Red Haired Boy
#3 Black Mountain Rag
#2 Salt Creek
#1 Blackberry Blossom

I have written new lead arrangements of these great standards to be included in a new Mel Bay book/CD combination, *Getting Into Flatpicking Guitar*. For this column over the next few issues, I would like to present some different rhythm ideas for these chestnuts, beginning with "Beaumont Rag."

"Beaumont Rag" is a popular Texas fiddle tune played in the key of F. It is generally accompanied with swingy Texas-style chords. Bluegrassers and flatpickers are more familiar with Doc Watson's arrangement played in C position on the guitar. We have to capo at the fifth fret to play in F with the fiddlers.

There may be some new chord shapes to learn in this arrangement. These are all commonly used swing chords, so your time will be well spent. "Beaumont Rag" includes many common chord situations which are described in detail below.

Measures 1-2: The tune begins with two measures of the V chord (G7). Here we play a different chord for each two beats without changing the basic chord structure (G7, D7/A, Bbdim, G/B).

Measures 3-4: Here is the I chord (C) leading to a V chord. We play C, Bb, B, C, Bdim. The Bb and B chords are simply a chromatic connection between the two C chords. The Bbdim is a descending connecting chord to the V chord in measure 5.

Measures 5-6: The Dm in measure 5 is a substitution for G7 which resolves in measure 6.

Measures 7-8: The C6 is a direct substitution for the plain C chord. The C#dim connects (in an ascending direction) to the IIm (Dm) in the next measure.

Measures 9-10: See 5-6

Measures 11-12: After one measure of C, the dominant C7 chord sets up the move to the IV chord (F).

Measure 13: The IV sharp diminished chord leads back to the I chord.

Measures 14-16: This typical rag phrase is often called a "6, 2, 5, 1," and is a useful progression to learn in all keys.

The rhythm for the A and B sections is played the same with one exception. Some players stop on beat one of measure seven, rest for seven beats and re-enter on beat one of measure nine. This is generally done only during the B section.

On the 1930s Bob Wills recording of "Beaumont Rag," Bob skips some measures. Because of this influential recording, rhythm players should listen carefully to the lead player and follow their lead. These variations should not be thought of as "right" or ""wrong," but simply as different way to play a great tune.

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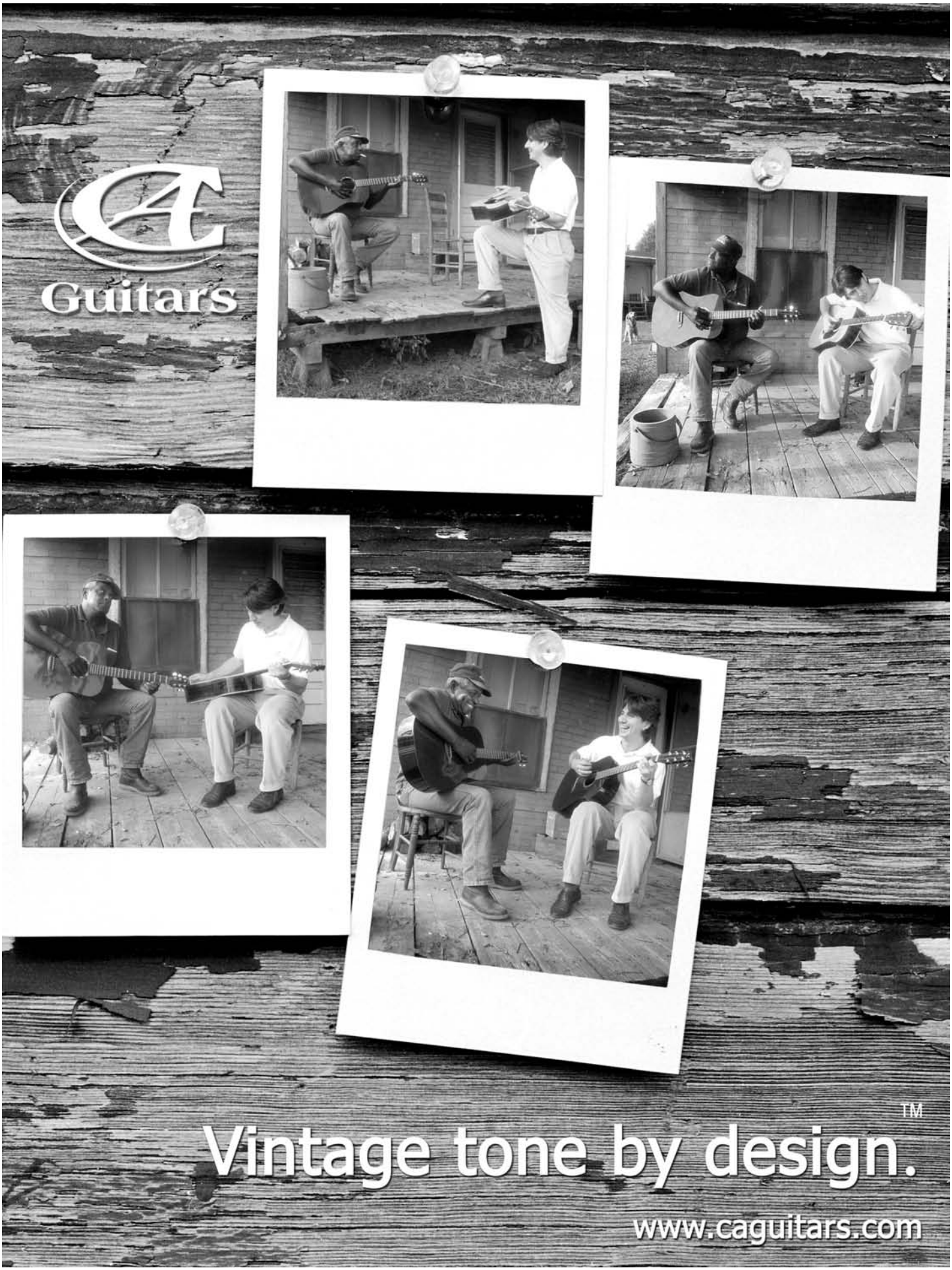
Beaumont Rag Rhythm

Arranged by Joe Carr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Flatpicking & Folk/Acoustic Rock

by John Tindel

Finger Exercises

Greetings again, all you pickers. This time, instead of featuring a particular song or solo, I wanted to divulge a few of the speed, strength building and cross-picking drills that I've accumulated over the years. I've been getting so much good feedback from my beginning and even my advanced students on these drills that I figured I'd better impact a few here. Just think of using these drills in the same way a runner would stretch his legs before running a few wind sprints or a vocalist would sing a few scales before a performance.

Finger Exercise #1 is very useful for warming up the equipment before playing. If done properly, you can achieve as much as 10-25% increase in speed and stamina after running a few of these.

Begin with the 1st finger on the 1st fret of the low E string, and proceed up the frets, one finger for each fret, to the 4th fret, then repeat the sequence on the 5th string, on the 4th string, and so on. When you get to the 4th fret on the 1st string, slide the pinky up to the 5th fret and start back down the neck, one fret at a time. Cross over from the 1st finger on the E string to the pinky on the 5th fret of the B string and go on down the strings in a like manner. When you get to the low E string, slide up a fret and start the process over. When you get up to the 12th fret on the 1st string with the little finger, slide it down to the 11th fret and just reverse the flow on down the neck. Play it as loud and as fast as you can, keeping a strict up-and-down picking pattern. As you work your way down the last few frets you may feel your forearm tightening up a little bit. Stop at the end and shake your hand out and stretch your wrist around. That lets the blood carry away the fatigue toxins. You'll be amazed at how supple and fast your left hand and right wrist will feel after doing this short, simple exercise.

Exercise #2 starts the same way: one finger per fret on the 6th string for 4 frets, but then jump to the 2nd fret on the A string for 4 frets, then go to the 3rd fret on the D string, and so on. Flow from the 1st through the 4th fingers (of the left hand) going up and reverse to 4th through the 1st coming down from the 12th fret. Again, play all these drills as fast and as loud as you can play them cleanly. Start in the 130-150 bpm range and work up from there.

Exercise #3: Again, start on the F on the 6th string for 4 frets, but skip up to the 4th string, then to the 2nd string, then to the 1st, and back down to the 3rd and 5th string. When you return to the 6th string, move up one fret and repeat the sequence. This exercise is good for building speed for cross-picking skipped strings.

Exercise #4 is all about speed. With a 6/8 feel (or paired triplets), play the first 4 frets on the 6th string with an up and down picking pattern as fast as you can, ten times in a row. Move up to the A string and repeat.

Exercise #5 is a twisted little geometric gem that's great for increasing facility across the strings and frets. Start on the F note, 6th string and change frets and strings, one of each at a time, all the way up the neck. It can be a little challenging to see the pattern on this one, but it's well worth the effort.

Finally, I thought of another exercise after I recorded the audio CD for the issue. Exercise #6 uses an alternate fingering variation on the Exercise #1 template. Instead of frets 1 through 4, do frets 1-3-2-4. Make sure the 1st and 2nd frets are always down strokes and frets 3 and 4 are always ups.

Start your sessions with any or all of these and I bet you'll notice some improvement. Here's to stronger left hands and faster right wrists!

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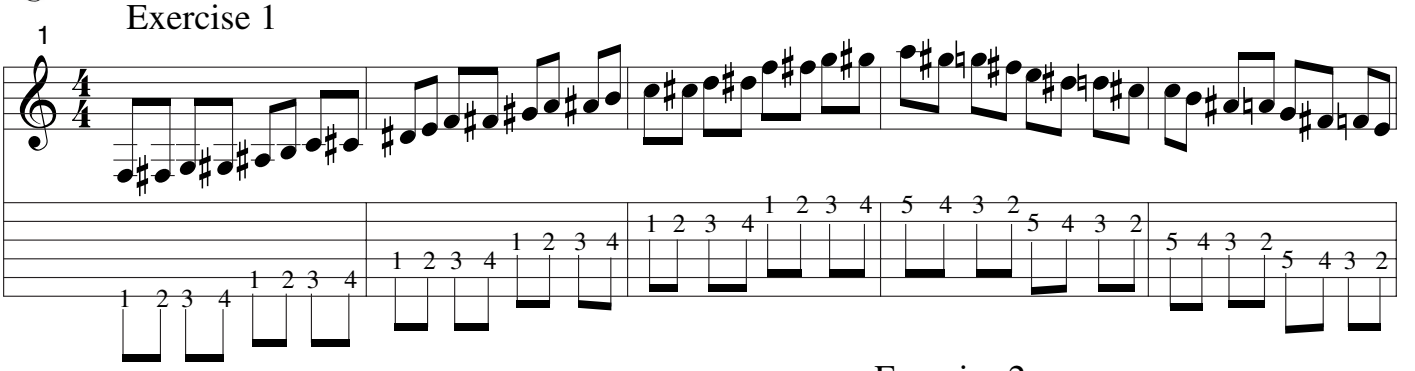

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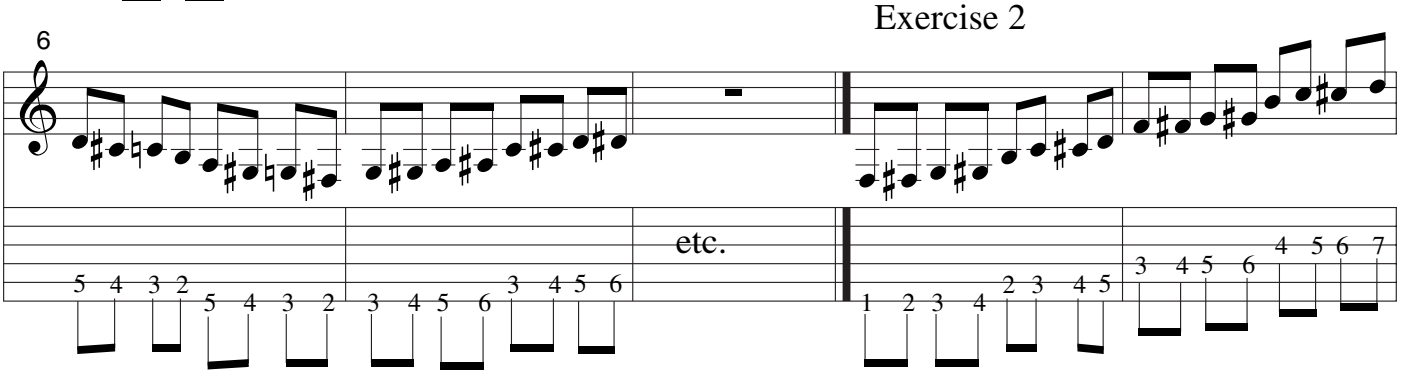
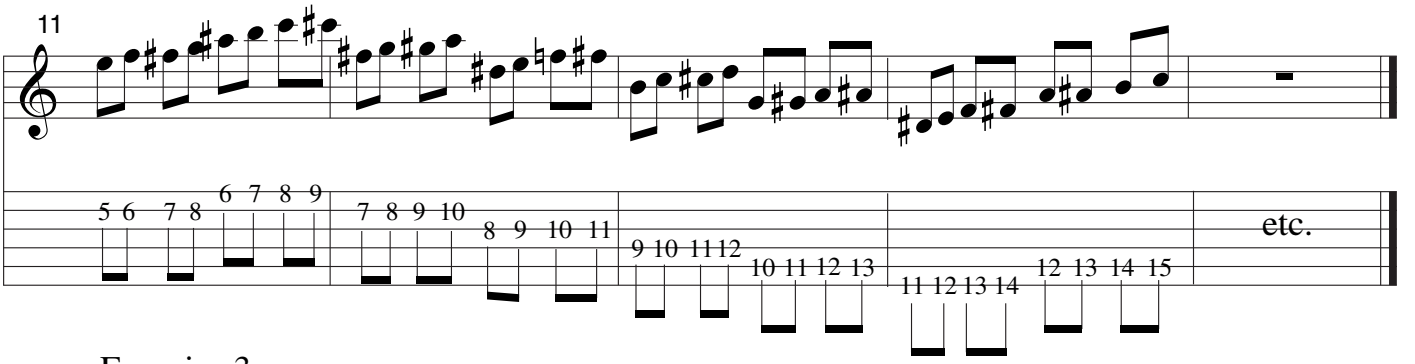
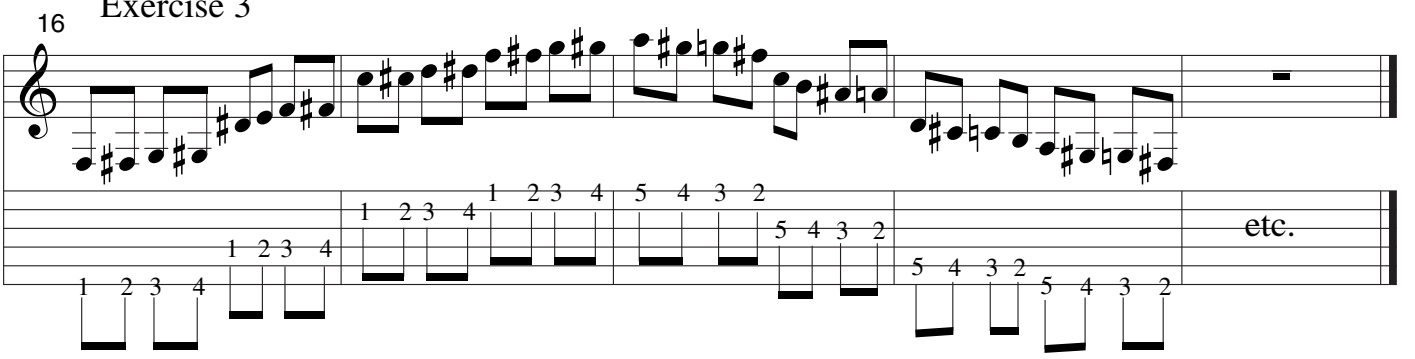
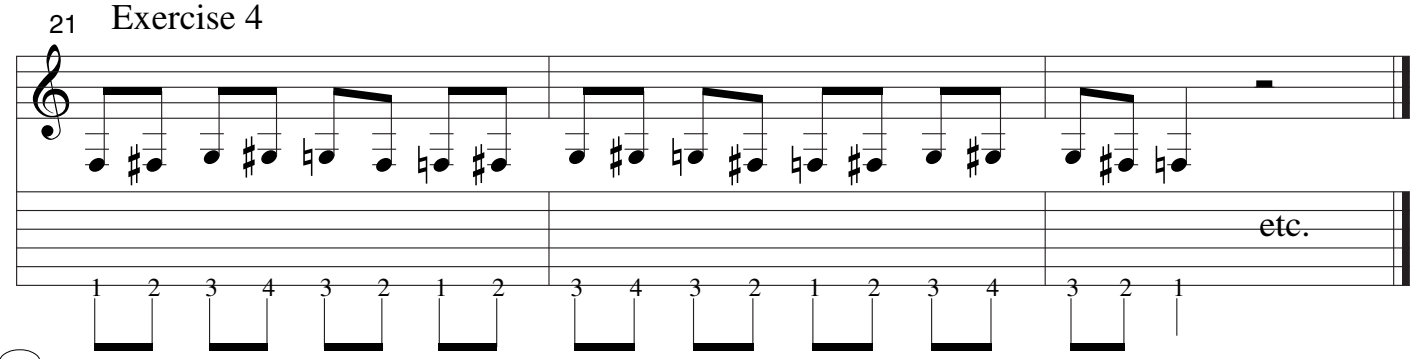




Exercise 3

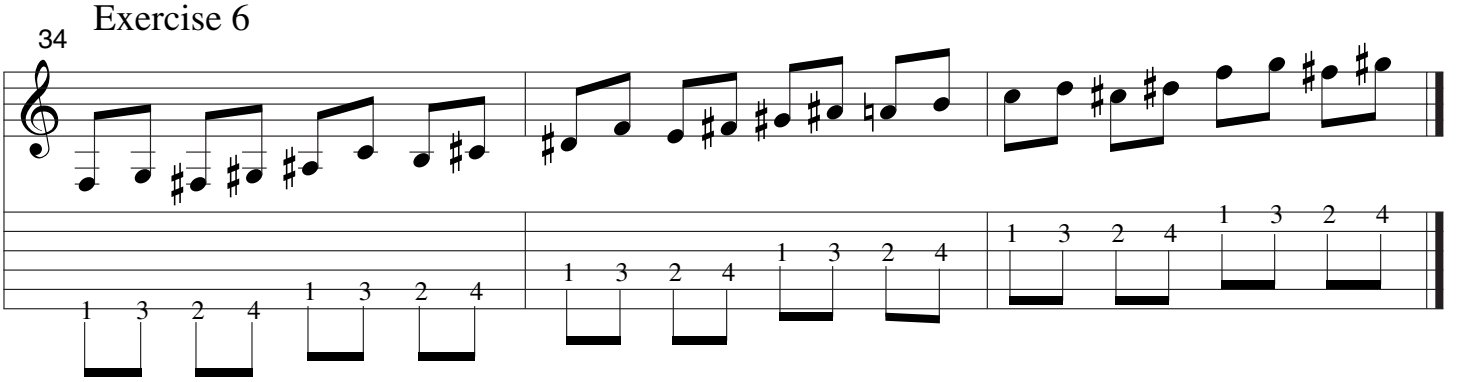


Exercise 4



Exercise 5

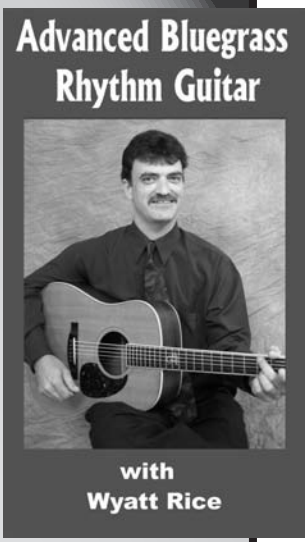
Exercise 6



Advanced Bluegrass Rhythm Guitar
with Wyatt Rice

In this 90-minute video, rhythm guitar master Wyatt Rice teaches you how to greatly expand your rhythm guitar abilities by teaching: crosspicking rhythm; syncopated rhythm; a variety of right hand patterns combined with left hand technique to develop a "groove" rhythm; unique bass runs; passing chords; chord substitutions; and chord inversions.

Additionally, Wyatt is shown improvisationally accompanying various instruments (banjo, fiddle, guitar, mandolin) and then analyzing what he has done to provide the rhythmic foundation behind each instrument. Also featured are guest appearances by: Rickie Simpkins on fiddle (Sally Goodin' and Dusty Miller) and mandolin (Big Country and I Wonder Where You Are Tonight), Sammy Shelor on banjo (Ground Speed and Whitewater), Kenny Smith on guitar (Goodbye, Liza Jane and Bill Cheathum) and Tony Rice (Waltz for Indira, Manzanita, and Devlin). Wyatt provides guitar accompaniment to each of these artists and then analyzes the techniques he has employed.



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Guitar Maintenance and Repair

by Frank Ford

Moving Day...

Ever notice how mandolins and banjos have position markers at the tenth fret while guitars have them at the ninth? No, I don't know why, either.

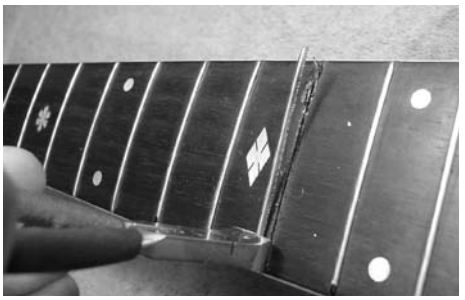
It appears that the conventional position for this inlay was not as well-defined 80 years ago, when this Stahl guitar was made by the Larson brothers of Chicago. Although they worked together with no real employees, and they had long careers as guitar builders, they never built instruments under their own family name, but instead used distributors' names such as Eupohon, Prairie State, and Stahl. They are credited with being the first to make the modern steel string flat top guitar, and their instruments are recognized today as some of the finest early steel string guitars.

For whatever reasons, they often made guitars with inlay position markers at the tenth fret, perhaps depending on the period of manufacture. For today's guitarist, particularly one who owns several instruments, a tenth fret inlay can be a real distraction, to say the least. It's hard enough to learn to play in high positions without having such a stumbling block on one guitar, while all the others are laid out conventionally.

So, here's the problem: a 1920 vintage Stahl flat top guitar, with the inlay at the tenth fret:

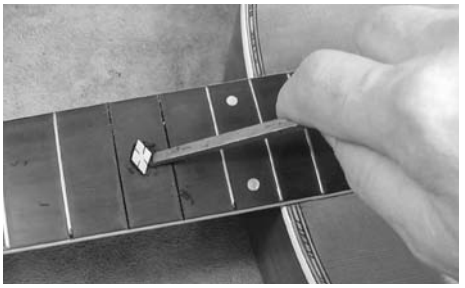
Its current owner is a fine guitarist with a number of vintage Martins, all (of course) with ninth fret inlays. My job was to transplant the inlay from the tenth, down one door to the ninth.

I started by clearing a bit of space, taking out the frets on either side of the inlay:



Then I used my big soldering iron on a wet rag to inject steam down into the inlay. Those early inlays were installed with hide glue, and the glue is easily softened with steam:

Once the glue was really soft and pliable, I was able to lift the inlay out safely with the end of a small chisel:

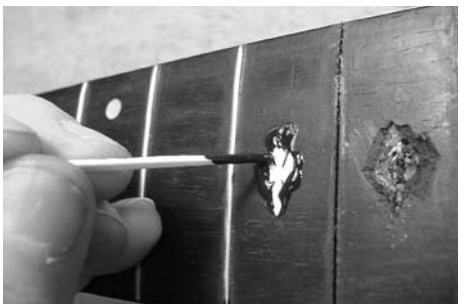


Had the inlay been a modern one, set in epoxy, cyanoacrylate, or other synthetic glue, it may not have been possible to lift the inlay out. In that case, I'd have to risk destroying the inlay by chipping out a lot of surrounding wood, or simply chipped the inlay out with a chisel. In that case, I'd have traced the inlay carefully so I could cut a new, matching one for the ninth fret position.

As you can see, I played it safe, and chipped some of the ebony fingerboard away to get access under that original inlay. I knew I'd have to patch that area, so I wasn't worried about making the hole bigger.

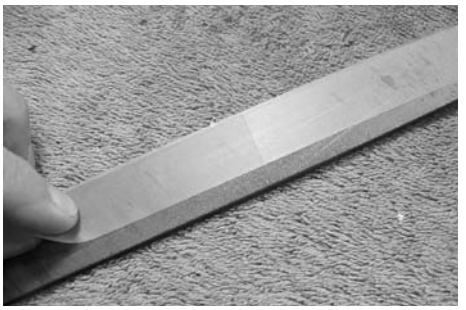
I traced the inlay in its new position, and drilled out the center with a brad point bit. Then, working with a chisel, I was able to finish the excavation with nice sharp points at the corners. I could have used a Dremel tool and a tiny router bit, but then the ends of the cuts would still need to be chiseled out, so I chose to avoid the setup and simply cut the recess by hand.

The inlay fit nicely, and I pressed it in place with some new hide glue mixed with lampblack so it would form black fill lines around the inlay and in the little cutouts. I presume that's how the Larsons did it back then, too.



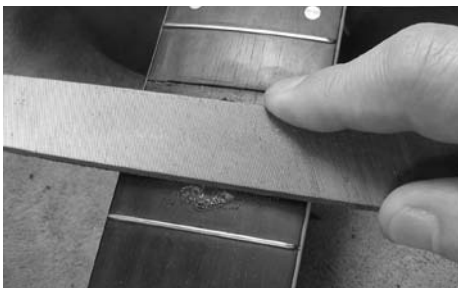
After the glue dried, the inlay and glue stood "proud" of the fingerboard just a bit, and I needed to level the surface of the

inlay without scarring the fingerboard, so I made a quick little "safety" file:



I just laid a strip of clear tape on the surface of the file, exposing about 1/4" of the teeth at the edge.

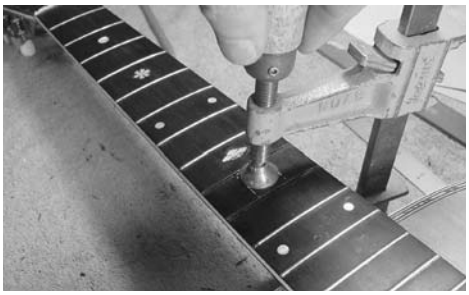
That way I could rub the file across the fingerboard without scratching the wood at all, and the teeth would be held a couple of thousandths of an inch above the surface, so when I finished filing the inlay, it would be sticking up only that amount. Then I'd be able to sand it flush with only a few strokes of fine sandpaper.



Next, I turned back to my original excavation hole. I defined the two outermost edges as straight lines between the ninth and tenth frets, and cut downward.

My broad chisel cut the edges very straight and cleanly, and my 1/2" chisel made quick work of the bottom of the slot. Once I finished up the slot, I made a matching piece of ebony to fill the area.

I made the piece with very slightly tapered outer edges, so it would fit into the recess like a cork, and exactly the same length as the original space, so the ends would form a correct fret slot. Then, with some clamping pressure, I glued the piece right in place:



One more pass with my little file trick over the new ebony, and then a quick sanding with the grain to avoid or eliminate any telltale cross grain scratches, and the fingerboard was complete:

Now, with the frets in place, you'd hardly notice that any work had been done in the area.

And, because the new ebony inlay actually tucks under the frets, there's no chance that a cross grain line will ever show up. So, I suppose I've muddied the waters even a bit more as to the Larsons' choice of inlay positions, but this great guitar is as playable as any new instrument, and it has a lot to say as the "voice" of a fine picker!

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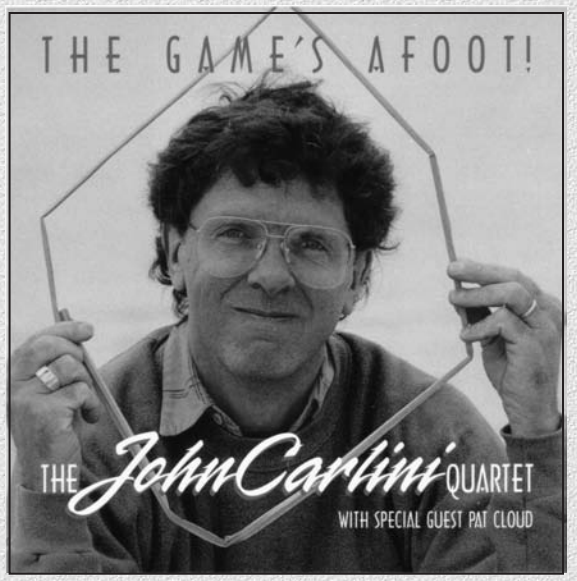

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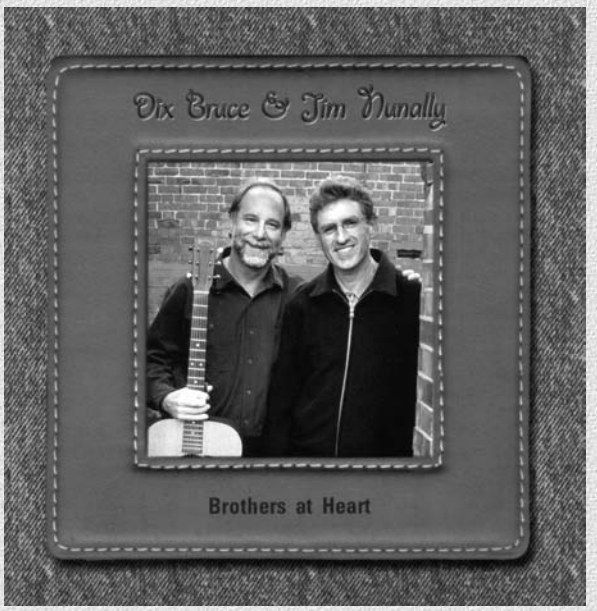

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Kaufman's Corner

by Steve Kaufman

Jerusalem Ridge

Here is another great tune that emerged from one of the original Blue Grass Boys, Kenny Baker. I understand that Kenny wrote most of the tune while Bill Monroe did help out on one of the parts. The first area of concern should be the 5th measure. You have a pull-off in a nest of eighth notes. Watch the right hand in this situation. The right hand acts as a metronome on its side (down-up-down-up, etc) whether it hits something or not. Here you have to start the pull-off on the up swing note. Complete the pull-off while the right hand fakes the down swing and then hit the last eighth note on its scheduled up swing. Whenever you find a hammer-on, pull-off or slide in a group of eighth notes, the rule is whatever way you hit the slide, hammer-on or pull-off is the direction you will hit the next.

Measure 24 has a different type set of eighths but the same principal applies. Hit the first note and hammer-on while faking the up swing. Fake the next down swing because the E note is tied. Then lastly swing up on the last note—G. The easiest rule to remember: first eight down and last eight up when tied together in groupings of two or four.

The next point of controversy is the D chord in the 3rd part. The melody does not imply whether it is a D or Dm. Most pickers use a Dm because your ear tells you so but when you play this with most Nashville boys and girls they will use the D major. This is what can be heard on the early LPs. Check them out.

Have fun with this classic and let me know how it treats you.

Bye for now and see you at Kamp in June!

Steve K.

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Jerusalem Ridge

Arranged by Steve Kaufman

Jerusalem Ridge (con't)

Adventures in Acoustic Music: Style Study

by John Carlini

Part 3A Bebop!

3A? Well, bebop is going to require a bit of preparation before we get to the actual musical study next time. (I'll call that one 3B!)

Here's the deal with bebop: chords, chords, and more chords. What can be stated in bluegrass using two or three chords may take 10 or 12 chords (changes) in bebop. Why? Because constantly shifting harmonies characterize the bebop style. Each chord change evokes a corresponding mode (scale). As that chord evolves into another chord, the parent mode adjusts to reflect that particular harmony. Then it moves to the next, and the next, and so on. There may even be four or more chords in a measure! But then you can look at it from another perspective. You could take those four chords and realize that they reflect one tonality. This simplifies the process. It's another form of our National Treasure and, as in bluegrass, it can be a life's work. I'm going to give you a bit of a jump start here.

II-Vs

Pick a chord. Any chord. Whatever chord you chose, that chord has a II-V chord-combo which leads into it! Let's make it easy. Let's pick G. (No pun intended.) What is the II-V chord combo that leads to G? Well, if G = I, then A = II, and D = V. Right? So II, V, I in the key of G would be A to D to G. At least, those would be the roots of the chords. Now we have to figure in the types of those chords. The II chord in a major key is "always" minor. The V chord is "always" major. (Why the quotes? We're assuming that nothing has been changed by the composer. It's a generic assumption, not a specific one.) This reflects triadic harmony—that is, chords built in thirds: major being 1-3-5 and minor being 1-b3-5. So now our II-V-I progression becomes Amin, D, G. In swing and bebop music, the harmony expands to include 7ths. As soon as that happens, the chords become Amin7, D7, G Maj7 and now you have something that sounds more like bebop.

From a fingerboard perspective, there are a few really good moves that I'm going to illustrate. First of all, please let go of the idea that you have to play four, five, or all six strings to play a chord. You can do it with three! Take a look at example 1 (A min7, D7, G maj7). These three chords which contain more harmonic influence, can be beautifully expressed using fewer notes! Notice that the roots of the chords are on the following strings, sixth (A), fifth (D), and sixth (G).

Now take a look at example 2. Here are the same three chords, only now the roots have changed strings: fifth (A), sixth (D), and fifth (G).

Here's what to do: memorize the forms and the sounds that they produce! You can now play II-V-I in the key of G in two places on the fingerboard. You are on the bebop trail! You want to do it in the key of Ab? Hey, move up a fret. You can now play Bbmin7, Eb7, and AbMaj7 in two positions on the fingerboard. Imagine that!

The following table shows the II-V-I progression in all 12 keys! (See Example 3.)

This is, of course, the "tip of the iceberg." But consider this: you now have the tools you need to play II-V-I progressions in 12 keys, each one in two different areas of the fingerboard.

Not bad for a day's work!

Next time, we'll finish our style study with a real bebop solo.

Have fun!

For performance and teaching information, please visit John's website (www.johncarlini.com) or e-mail John at jlc@johncarlini.com. And you can hear the new John Carlini Quartet CD, The Game's Afoot*, featuring mandolin and 5-string banjo legends Don Stiernberg and Pat Cloud, on the new FGM Records (www.fgmrecords.com) label!*

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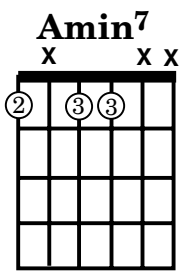
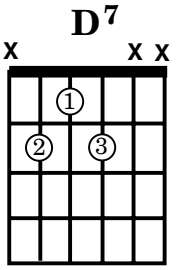
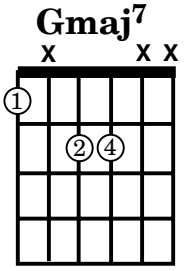
Bebop Style

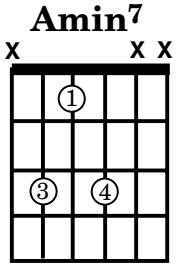
Example 1

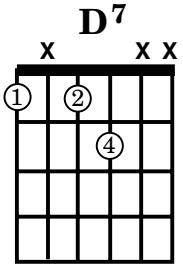


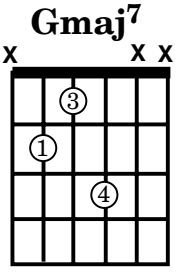




Example 2







Example 3

Key	II Chord	V Chord	I Chord
C	D min7	G7	C Maj7
G	A min7	D7	G Maj7
D	E min7	A7	D Maj7
A	B min7	E7	A Maj7
E	F# min7	B7	E Maj7
B	C# min7	F#7	B Maj7
Gb	Ab min7	Db7	Gb Maj7
Db	Eb min7	Ab7	Db Maj7
Ab	Bb min7	Eb7	Ab Maj7
Eb	F min7	Bb7	Eb Maj7
Bb	C min7	F7	Bb Maj7
F	G min7	C7	F Maj7

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8. Railroad Bill
9. The Golden Slippers
10. Jimmie Brown the Newsboy
11. Sitting on Top of the World
12. Beautiful Brown Eyes
13. I'll Love Nobody But You
14. Mike's Marathon
15. I'm on My Way, But I'll Be Back Someday

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Flatpick Profile:
Jim Fish

by Dan Miller

Jim Fish performing with the Byron Berline Band

Every flatpicker has experienced the frustration of trying to keep pace with a hot and fast banjo or fiddle player. By the time your lead break rolls around, your right arm is already cramped and numb from trying to keep up with the rhythm. When you step off to take your solo, your right hand just does not want to work correctly. You are thinking "I can play this so good at home," while you are stumbling and fumbling through sloppily played notes hoping that you can at least make it to the end of the solo and avoid a complete and total "crash and burn" situation. This issue's "Flatpick Profile" artist, Jim Fish, experienced this feeling to an even greater degree than that described above. He found himself in a jam session with one of the world's greatest fiddle players trying to play fiddle tunes he was unfamiliar with while using his bare thumb and fingers instead of a flatpick.

Although he had been playing the guitar for years, Jim's very first exposure to playing fiddle tunes was in the middle of a two-person jam session with none other than Byron Berline. Jim recalls, "I had been a big fan of the Byrds and Gene Clark and Byron had played on many of their cuts. I knew of Byron and was a fan, but I did not have much experience playing fiddle tunes on the guitar. When Byron moved to Guthrie [Oklahoma], a mutual friend introduced us and Byron invited me to come down to his fiddle shop. I went there to meet him and he was just leaving, so we went to his house and started picking. I wasn't using a flatpick much in those days, I mainly played with my thumb and fingers, and I didn't know many fiddle tunes. When we started jamming, Byron would call out a fiddle tune and I was trying to figure out the chords and keep up the rhythm at the same time. Then Byron would stop and say, "take one." And I tried to struggle through it. It was a real endurance match! I started thinking, 'I have got to learn how to play with a pick.' I started practicing when I got home that day."

Even though Jim felt that he was struggling during that first jam, Byron must have thought that he did pretty good because he invited Jim to join him at a weekly jam session, which included banjo great John Hickman. Can you imagine cutting your flatpicking teeth by jamming every Wednesday with Byron Berline and John Hickman? Jim remembers, "It was ten months of intense learning." During the Wednesday sessions the group began working up set lists, but Jim recalls, "Byron never mentioned that we were going to be a band, we just kept working up songs. But eventually he got us some gigs and we became a band." That was nearly ten years ago.

Although it must have been quite intimidating to play in that company while struggling to learn how to negotiate acoustic guitar strings with a flatpick, Jim says, "I felt very fortunate to have the opportunity to play with Byron and John Hickman. I was forced to learn how to play at top speed and make sense of it. They always play at top speed and they do it with such precision, timing, and tastefulness, it was a great opportunity for me to be around that. It was a completely new kind of music for me and becoming immersed in it with those guys, and becoming proficient at it, was a great thing."

Jim Fish grew up in Albany, New York, and got his first guitar shortly after the Beatles hit the US in 1964. He says, "My older brother got a guitar when the Beatles records started coming out. I started playing with his guitar and seemed to have a natural ear for it." Jim's father was a jazz piano player and although he did not teach Jim very much about music, Jim says that his father gave him one piece of advice that he has always remembered. "My father emphasized the importance of syncopation and playing 'unusual' instead of playing straight. He told me that the difference between someone who was good and someone who was great was that the great players played it their own way."

Although Jim's early guitar influences were from 60s rock bands like the Beatles, the Band, and the Byrds, he says, "My mother was from Pennsylvania and her family had a country sensibility. I learned songs like 'Wreck of the Old 97' and 'Old

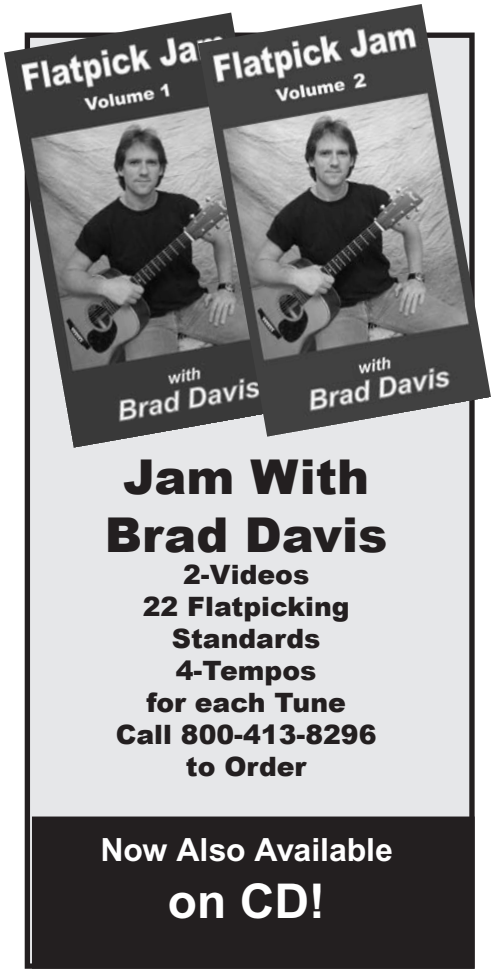
Time Religion' from her brother, Bob Potter. My brother Dean was also a fan of Johnny Cash and the Tennessee Three and we loved the cool solos in the middle of those songs, played with the classic country Telecaster." Jim also enjoyed the music of Flatt and Scruggs, especially Earl's banjo playing. He started learning how to incorporate some of Earl's banjo rolls on the guitar. Recalling his first exposure to flatpicking, Jim says, "The first time I heard flatpicking was on the Glen Campbell show. The credits were rolling at the end and Glen started picking a solo to 'Gentle On My Mind.' I thought that was great."

The first time Jim got the opportunity to see someone flatpick live was an experience that he says, "changed my life." The occasion was a live Byrds show at the Fillmore East in New York. The guitar player was Clarence White. During the show the Byrds played "Black Mountain Rag" and "Soldier's Joy." Jim remembers, "Clarence played that stuff effortlessly. He also had that banjo influence in his solos and stylings. The syncopation…the pregnant pauses…the set up notes…I was a changed person. I couldn't fathom how a guitar player could play that way. I was watching someone apply the advice that my father had given to me. That defines Clarence for me."

Jim first saw Clarence in 1969. He was 18 years old and had been playing the guitar for about 6 years. When asked how he applied that "life changing" experience to his guitar playing, Jim said, "Seeing Clarence opened my eyes and proved my father's theory to me. It illustrated that the possibilities are there to be free, open, and unique. When you listen to something on a record, you may say, 'That sounds nice.' But when you can see it live, you feel the impact and it makes more sense. Before I saw Clarence I had a lot of information about the guitar, but I hadn't integrated it all. When I saw him do it, it made me realize that it could be done. It inspired me to try and learn things that I previously had felt would be too hard for me."

In 1971 Jim joined the southern rock band Sienna. The bandleader was Henry Paul, who would later go onto southern rock fame with the Outlaws. Sienna played original tunes in the country rock vein and achieved some limited success, but broke up when Henry Paul moved back to Florida and formed the Outlaws, and then later went on to play with Blackhawk. In 1978, after success with the Outlaws and Blackhawk, Henry Paul formed his own band—the Henry Paul Band—and invited Jim to move down to Florida. Jim played in that band for two years, during which time they recorded two albums, but in 1981 he decided that "life on the road with a southern rock band was too hard."

At that point in his career, Jim set the guitar down for a few years and got a job as an entry level animal handler at Busch Gardens in Tampa, FL. By 1985 he had moved to Tyler, Texas, to work at the Caldwell Zoo and he joined a country band that played as the house band at the Texas Opry. They played a variety show every Saturday night. In 1989 he moved to Oklahoma City and got a job at the Oklahoma City Zoo as the curator of birds. He also tried to break into the music scene in Oklahoma City, but said, "I couldn't get hooked up with anyone." Jim stayed out of music until 1991 when a "full-tilt" country rock band called the Hillbilly Lovegods performed at the zoo. Jim watched



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Richard Starkey

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Richard Starkey, formerly of the C.F. Martin Repair Department, is recognized as one of America's leading acoustic guitar repair experts.

He has been featured in Dan Erlewine's *Guitar Player Repair Guide*, Washburn & Johnson's *Martin Guitars*, as well as numerous guitar publications including *Guitarmaker*, *Flatpicking Guitar*, and *Acoustic Guitar*.

He has more than 25 years of experience in stringed instrument building and repair. He began his career at Ovation Guitars and C. Bruno & Sons, eventually moving on to the C.F. Martin Company in Nazareth, PA.

At Martin, Richard worked in many areas: repair, production and artist relations, including setting up guitars for many of the celebrity recording artists who play Martin Guitars. He is Martin's showcase player and clinician, conducting numerous clinics for Martin dealers nationwide.

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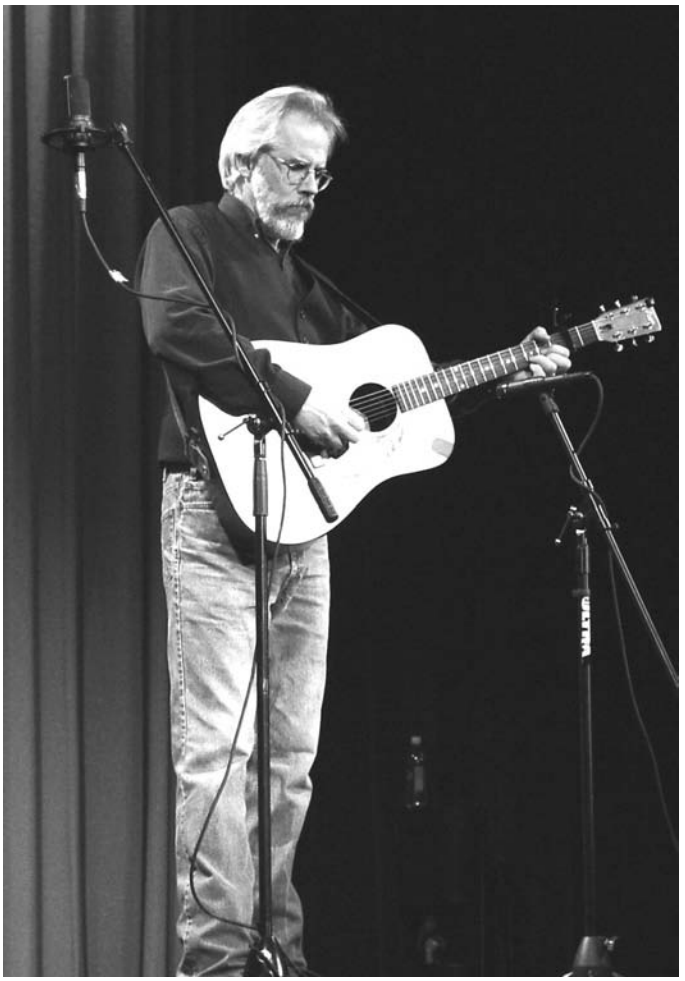


the show and thought, "the thing they need is a guitar player who knows the kind of country licks that I play." He asked if he could sit in with them sometime. The band liked what they heard and invited him to join. He took the gig, but said that after a while playing full-tilt country rock to huge crowds wore thin. In 1992 he joined a three-piece acoustic guitar act that wrote their own material and worked up old folk tunes.

Since joining Byron Berline in 1994, Jim has had the opportunity to learn how to flatpick fiddle tunes alongside one of the world's greatest fiddle players. When asked about what advice he had to lend other guitar players who were struggling to keep up with fast fiddlers, Jim said, "If you want to develop endurance, it is just like running. You have to practice everyday and gradually build up. There are two ways to do it. You can start out at slower speeds and gradually build up, or you can play at full speed and work at it over and over and over until you can get it. I had to do it the second way because the band wasn't going to slow down for me. When playing at full speed, the first thing to do is try to just keep up with the rhythm."

Regarding speed and endurance, Jim also said, "I think that physical fitness is essential for bluegrass players. You need to be in shape to play that chopping, hard-driving rhythm. I used to smoke cigarettes, but I found that I could not do it and maintain the endurance required to be in a bluegrass band. I felt like I had a choice: I could smoke, or I could sing and play at my full potential. So I stopped smoking."

Up until about three years ago Jim played a Martin D-25K (koa wood), which he said "has a nice ringing sound." Then, about three years ago at Byron Berline's festival in Guthrie, OK, Jim Triggs brought him an all-maple guitar and asked him to try it out. Jim says, "It was really nice. I liked it a lot. That was the last time I played my Martin. Then last year at Byron's festival Jim Triggs brought another guitar for me to try. This one was a D-18 copy. I played it and gave it back to Jim. I walked away and thought, 'I have to have that guitar!' I have played that one ever since. Jim makes a beautiful guitar and it is fun to be associated with him."

To date Jim Fish has recorded three CDs with Byron's band. He also played on Byron's solo CD. He says his next project is going to be a solo CD. On the next page we have transcribed Jim's solo to "Train 45." The cut you will hear on the audio CD was taken from the Byron Berline Band's CD *One Eyed Jack*.

Train 45

Arranged by Jim Fish
Transcribed by Brad Davis

Train 45 (con't)

Triggs Guitars

by Richard McConnell

Luthier Jim Triggs

The Walnut Valley Festival has caught my undivided attention and attendance for the past 29 years. For me, one of the most interesting features of this festival is located under the grandstand. Since the Walnut Valley Festival is home to the National Flatpicking Guitar Championship, you will not only see and hear some of the world's finest flatpickers, but you will see many rare and wonderful examples of guitar building on the stages and in the booths. Two separate huge rooms house the craft and artistic booths, the music stores, and the luthier display booths. From this concrete floor, with festival music in the background and the noise of a shopping crowd, careers in instrument making have been launched. I have seen this same piece of concrete display the excellent work of Stuart Mossman of Mossman Guitars, J.W. and Don Gallagher of Gallagher Guitars, Mike Kemnitzer of Nugget Mandolins and Charles Hoffman of Hoffman Guitars. From this launch pad, Paul Schneider, the creator of Summit Mandolins and many other luthiers have been lifted into a broader world associated with acoustic music.

This past year was exceptional because Jim Triggs' booth was next door neighbors with the *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine* booth. It looked like a story to me. You may ask yourself, "What was Jim Triggs doing on this launch pad?" Jim is already an established luthier. His arch top guitars and mandolins are well known for their beauty and tone. Jim's guitar and mandolin building goes back to the 70s when he built under the Kansas Mandolin flag. In the early 80s Jim moved to California with his wife Mary Ann and son Ryan, and began creating mandolin masterpieces in his home shop in L.A. In the mid 80s, Jim was hired by Gibson Guitars to work in Nashville and build mandolins, but after the purchase of Flatiron, Jim became the supervisor of the Custom Shop. He also collaborated with Greg Rich on nearly 25 Gibson art piece instruments. In Jim's final year and a half at Gibson he oversaw the arch top guitar line. The entire time Jim was an employee at Gibson he was involved in Artist Relations and promotion. Maxwell McCollough wrote a detailed history of Jim's career; that article currently resides on www.mandolincafe.com. A June, 1988 article in *Frets Magazine* detailed Jim's work at the Gibson Guitar Company. These articles and others related to Jim's work are posted on www.triggsguitars.com.

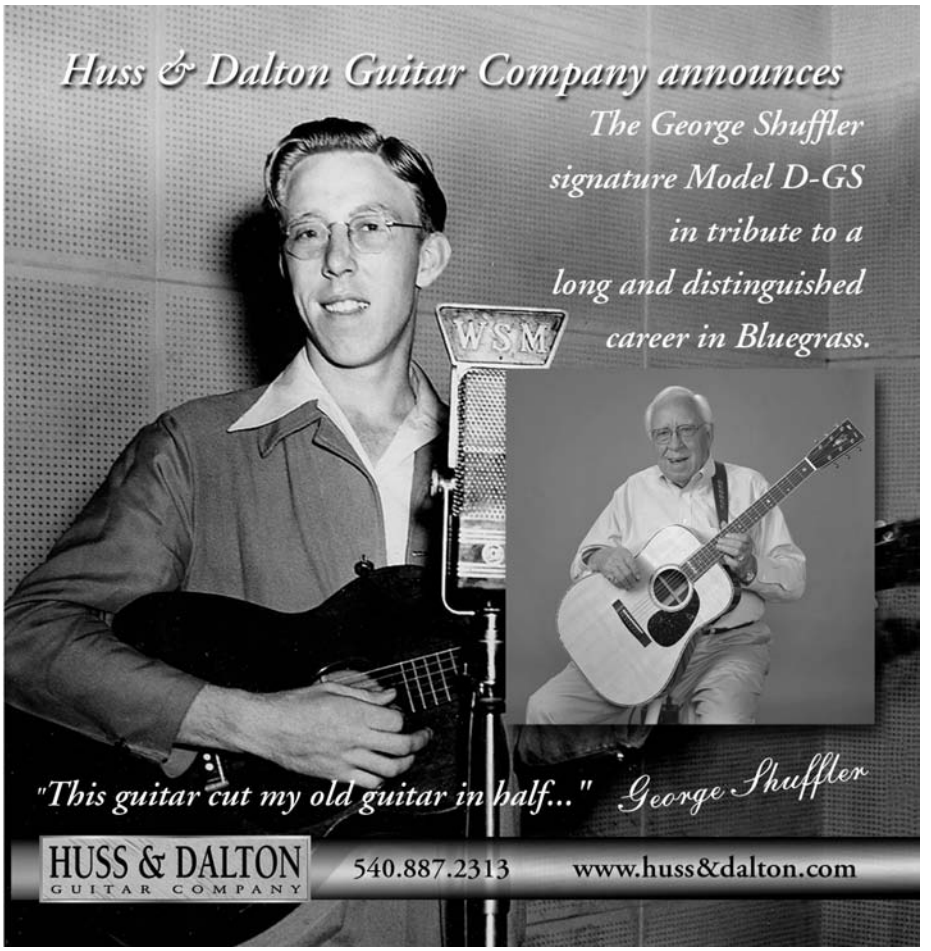
In 1998, the Triggs family moved back to Kansas City. In 2002 Jim was at Winfield at this historic spot to announce that his son Ryan would be joining the family business, continuing the legacy and promise of carved jazz guitars, flattops and mandolins that are the mainstays of Triggs Guitars. Jim had several mandolins to display and even donated an A-5 mandolin as a prize for the Walnut Valley Association Mandolin Contest.

At Winfield, placed prominently on the Triggs Guitar table was a beautifully inlaid walnut guitar. This is the guitar that Jim and Ryan built for Bob Redford, who is the Walnut Valley Festival promoter and one of the festival's originators. They built this guitar to honor Bob and to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the festival. The walnut used to construct the guitar was harvested from the Redford homestead and seasoned in their chicken coop (for more about this guitar, see the article on page 36).

Also in the booth, along with Jim's wife Mary Ann, who helps at festivals and is responsible for all of the Triggs Guitar bookkeeping, were two other guitars. One looked ancient, as if it was played in honkytonks and worn by time on the road. On closer inspection, I noticed the headstock had the Triggs logo. Knowing that Jim's building only went back to the 70s—not the 40s—I wondered aloud, "What is this?" Jim just smiled and asked, "What do you think about that?" This guitar represented yet another offering of the Triggs Guitar shop, the distressing and antiquing option. This same guitar is now the property of Jim Fish, the guitar player for the Byron Berline Band.

"The guitar looked like it had been floated to Guthrie [OK] on the river and was savaged by a bobcat on the way," Jim Fish explained. "Actually, Jim and his son reportedly 'vintaged it,' which means they deliberately and artistically altered the appearance of the guitar to make it seem as though it was far older than it is. It truly does look at least seventy years old. When I first saw it, it was probably three weeks old! At any rate, again I was smitten by the sound of the guitar sufficiently to make arrangements to buy it on the spot. I have played it exclusively since I took possession of it." said Jim Fish.

Since the festival and the addition of Ryan's help, Triggs Guitars has announced a new line of fine acoustic guitars now in production. The new Triggs flattops offer two styles of bracing, the Martin style and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the Gibson style. "The Gibson style is more heavily braced and offers a country sound," said Jim. This is the same style Triggs guitar that Alan Jackson plays. "The Martin scalloped bracing produces a bluegrass sounding guitar," he explained.

Customers can select from three basic models: the FT 500 (a maple dreadnaught), the FT 280, (a rosewood back and sides instrument), and the FT8, (a mahogany bodied guitar). Standard features on a Triggs guitar include a Sitka spruce top, Grover tuners, jumbo fret wire, a 12" radius fret board, 25" scale, ebony or rosewood fingerboards, and position dots. Fishman electronics, preamps, and thin-line under-saddle pickups are options. A satin or gloss nitrocellulose lacquer finish is available on the guitars. Triggs flattops start at $2,000.

Since Jim is well known for his creative expression on his instruments, the customer is only limited by his imagination when requesting inlay work or custom features. Jim worked in the custom shop for Gibson and was the point man for their Nashville Artist Relations office. Jim considers his time at Gibson as his "graduate school education in building and customer relations." Being a musician and a builder gives Jim that special understanding that shows in his work and conversation.

Jim has researched many old instruments and knows what is going to work. The first impression of any guitar is the feel of the neck. Before the sound can be evaluated the feel of the neck sends immediate feedback to the musician. The Triggs guitar neck intentionally has the feel of the Lloyd Loar mandolin neck design.

Robin Kessinger is a proud owner of a Triggs guitar. Robin said, "I love my Triggs. It's a beautiful maple guitar. Not only is it beautiful, it's also very loud, which is unusual. Usually you have to wait for them to open up. I can't wait to hear what mine sounds like five years from now. The craftsmanship of my guitar and all other Triggs I've seen is flawless. Jim Triggs is not just another guitar builder, he's an artist."

Jim has built over 500 guitars since leaving Gibson in 1992. With Ryan's help this duo plans on building 50 to 60 guitars per year. With their website (www.triggsguitars.com) in place, they hope to place most of their guitars through direct sales. A quick trip to their website will also show you the electric guitars, ukuleles, mandolins, jazz guitars, arch tops and flattops created by Triggs Guitars.

An artist roster, pricing, photos and other articles are also posted.

Jim and Ryan plan on moving to a larger facility later this year. They also have some interesting plans in the works for a very special presentation of a guitar to help celebrate the upcoming 10th anniversary of *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine*. It's coming up quicker than you think and Triggs Guitars is preparing to be a part of that celebration.

A Retrospect of Ryan Triggs
by Jim Triggs

In the idea stages of this article I mentioned to Dan Miller that I thought it would be fun to do a little reminiscing about the six years I spent working for Gibson in Nashville. After months of delay in writing some of the Gibson history it finally dawned on me it would make more sense for the purpose of this article to share with you some words about the experiences I've had with my son Ryan working with me in the shop.

I guess it had always been a dream of mine for Ryan to one day join me in guitar building. There have been very few father-and-son teams in the world of instrument making. From the first half of the 1900s, the Strombergs—Charles and Elmer—who were father-and-son archtop builders come to mind; the only other tandem I can think of is Don Gallagher and his father J.W. There just haven't been too many related guitar building duos.

Ryan first showed interest in the shop around ten years ago, when he was 10. He wanted to, as he said, "cut on the band saw." My wife Mary Ann was not very excited about it but I gave him a few simple projects on it anyway such as cutting straight lines and cutting more straight lines. Boredom set in shortly and he soon found himself sweeping up sawdust in the shop.

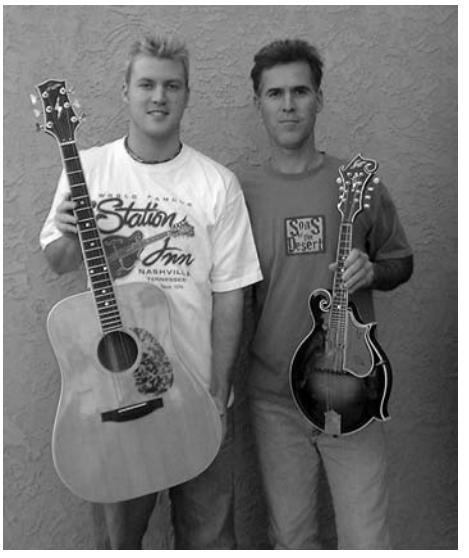
Next I showed him how to rim line the kerfing on guitars. He picked it up rather quickly but I don't recall his attention span at that time being so great. He would work for a while and then his friend Larry from down the street would come over and they would go and play basketball. The goal was only ten feet from the shop door and I guess he figured out that playing basketball was more fun than rim lining. Shop work to a 10 or 11 year old is like cutting grass: it's fun the first couple of times but soon becomes a chore.

Back in the Nashville years (1986-1998) when I was doing Artist Relations for Gibson, Ryan had the opportunity to meet a who's who of country artists and many of the big time bluegrass artists. I'd take him to Earl's house or down to the Station Inn to see Bill or Roland. Ranger Doug or Marty Stuart would occasionally drop by our house. He saw many artists come and go, and although it was probably strange as a kid to see people he had met and been around on the TV or in videos, he seemed to take it all in stride.

We moved to Kansas in 1998. I never, at any time, pushed music or instrument building on Ryan but I figured since he had been around both his whole life that someday he would be drawn to at least one of them. A couple of years ago he mentioned that he would like to help me in the shop. In the beginning there was no pressure on him, as he started out rim lining again. He also would clean the shop and run various errands for me (Home Depot, Fed Ex, UPS).

Over the past few years, while attending college, Ryan has been working 15-20 hours a week for me and over 30 hours a week in the summer. In that time he has learned many of the processes of guitar building. I rarely do any sanding or rim lining anymore as he does it all. He also binds flat top bodies, pegheads and fingerboards, and makes braces and glues them to the tops and backs. We made a deal early on that I would show him a process and after he learned to do it as well as I could do it, we would move on and I'd teach him something new. I think within a year from now Ryan will be able to build a whole flat top by himself. Lately I've been sliding him in to the construction of arch tops and he has also been working on mandolins and electric guitars.

All in all it has been a rewarding experience working with my son, but more than that, I enjoy being his teacher. When we first started we made a deal that we would never listen to rap music, and any father and son problems we might have would not be brought into the shop. So far, it has worked out well. Ryan hopes to build guitars full time after he is finished with his college studies in a couple of years, but as we all know 20-year-olds like to change their minds sometimes. In the meantime I enjoy his company in our shop and passing along to him a few tricks that I've picked up along the way.



Ryan & Jim Triggs

The Triggs Walnut Valley Festival 30th Anniversary Guitar

by Dan Miller

Many readers of this magazine hold a special place in their heart for the Walnut Valley Festival in Winfield, Kansas. This is not only because it has been the site of the National Flatpicking Championship for the past 31 years, but primarily because it is where we go to pick with, and visit with, our extended "flatpicking family." The people we pick with on the third weekend in September every year are among the friends we hold dearest, even though we usually only see them once a year. The Walnut Valley Festival is the picker's gathering place (aptly nicknamed "picker's paradise") and for a good part of the year we are all looking forward to, and practicing for, our trip to Winfield.

When the 30th anniversary of his festival was approaching, promoter Bob Redford wanted to do something special for himself and his family that would serve as a reminder of the event and an heirloom for his family. His idea was to have a Walnut Valley Festival 30th Anniversary guitar built and in order to make it extra special he wanted to have it made from wood which came from an old walnut tree that had been in the front yard of his family's home place.

Bob explains, "Twenty-seven years ago a 100-year-old walnut tree that was in the front yard of my mother's home was struck by lightning and we had to cut it down. After it was cut down I had the tree milled and I put the wood up in the barn. I thought that I would do some woodworking when I retired." Bob had grown up in that home and had very fond memories of the tree (he later bought the home from his mother and he lives in that same home today). The tree had held Bob's basketball goal when he was a young boy and he had parked his car under it when he was a teenager. Bob said, "That tree had a great deal of sentimental value. I thought it was the logical thing to build a guitar from that wood. I wanted something special that I could hand down to my grandson."

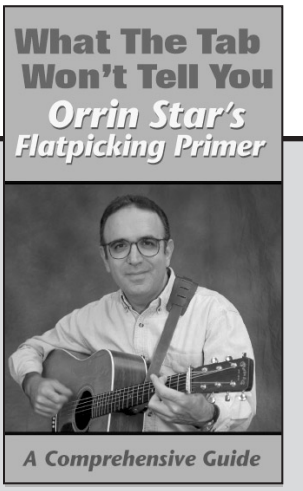
When the idea came to him about building a guitar from that wood, the first builder that Bob thought of was Kansas City luthier Jim Triggs. Bob said, "I have known Jim for a long time. I had met him during the early years of the festival and we have always stayed in touch."

When asked about the project, Jim said that he had always admired what Bob had done with the festival and thought that it would be fun to be involved. He went to Bob's home and dug through the pile of wood that Bob had in the barn and came up with enough suitable walnut to build the guitar. Bob provided artwork for the inlay and Jim hired Brian England to cut the inlay on his computerized system.

Regarding the use of all walnut on the guitar, Jim said, "The walnut was really dense, so the guitar is pretty heavy. It is a pound or two heavier than a Dreadnought built with rosewood and spruce. Because the top is walnut, it is not the best sounding guitar. However, I approached building this guitar more as artwork. I knew it would primarily be a display guitar."

Bob said that he was very pleased with the final product, mentioning that "the inlay is gorgeous." Bob and Jim are now talking about Jim building a walnut F-5 style mandolin. Jim will also be building a mandolin to donate to the festival as a contest prize for next year's mandolin contest. Jim said, "It is a lot of fun being a part of this festival. I attended the festival for about ten years after it started. Then I moved to California, and then Nashville, and was unable to attend. Now that I am back in Kansas I'm not going to miss another one."

Many of us feel exactly the same way—every year, on the third weekend in September, we head for Winfield. If you attend this year's event come by Jim Trigg's booth and take a look at the Walnut Valley 30th Anniversary guitar. Bob usually brings it out for Jim to show. It is quite a work of art.



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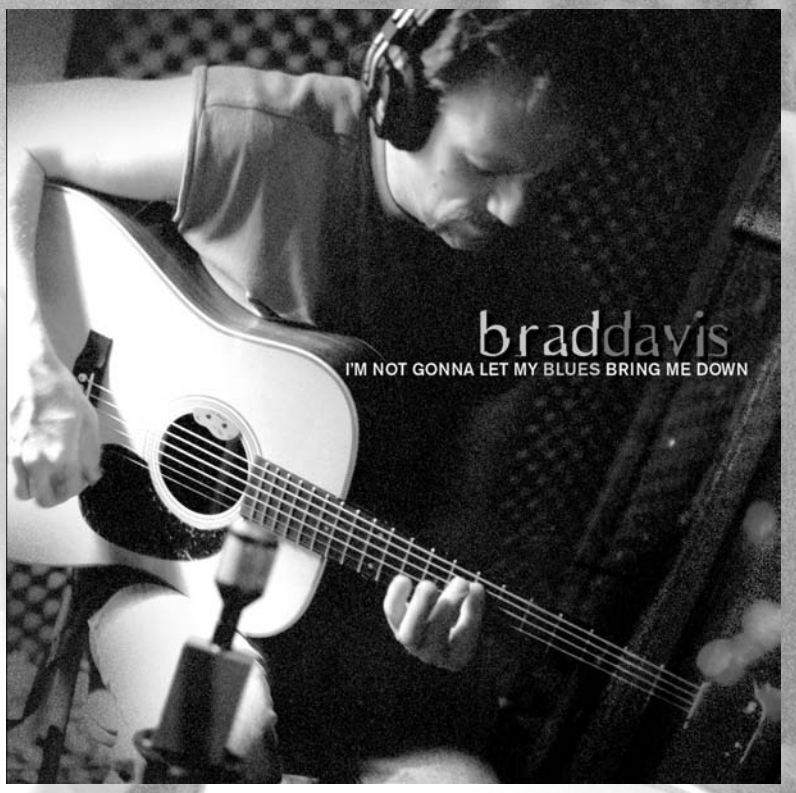

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NASHVILLE FLATTOP

By Brad Davis

Old Number Nine

Train songs have always been a favorite of mine. "Old Number Nine" is a song that I wrote with a wonderful hit songwriter by the name of Rick Peoples. Mr. Peoples wrote a handful of top ten hits for the likes of Randy Travis, Reba, Billy Joe Royal and many others. The idea was to create a song with the hard driving beat of a traditional standard, but also, one that showcased the chords and rhythms of something new and fresh. This song was recorded on my new CD on FGM Records titled *I'm Not Gonna Let My Blues Bring Me Down*. I wanted a mandolin guest on this song and the only choice was Sam Bush. I called Sam and asked if he would consider playing on my new record and I was honored he said "yes."

On the next page is the break that I take on this hard driving train song. The solo is a mixture of traditional down-up-downs and double-down-ups. Both techniques work hand-in-hand together to take the listener on a dynamic journey during the solo. Start slow and remember to learn the note map and then work on your speed. If the D-D-Up technique gives you fits then play that section with regular down-up-downs. Hope you all enjoy this one! We had a riot cutting it!

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Wildwood Flower (Kenny, David, & Wyatt)
Nine Pound Hammer (Kenny, David, & Wyatt)
Big Sandy River (Kenny, David, & Wyatt)
Minor Swing (Kenny, David, & Wyatt)
Black Mountain Rag (Kenny, David, & Wyatt)

Audio CD
Track 22

Old Number Nine

Arranged by Brad Davis

The Solo Flatpicker

by Dan Crary

Crosspicking

It's even more important when you're a solo player…crosspicking, that is.

Yeah, over in that other world, the world of flatpicking-buried-in-the-madness-and-cacophony-of-the-old-time-or-bluegrass-band, the world where tempos are too fast, sound systems are bad, and timing is an abstraction that lives only in the noumenal world of Plato's perfect forms…it's a world where only fiddles and banjos win the every-man-for-himself competition for who will be heard (if there's any audience left after all the noise), and where anything you do on the guitar seems only to add to the confusion. Over there, you can crosspick or play double-time, or rip off a Brad Davis lick, and often as not, it'll be great, but nobody will notice.

Of course, not all bands are like that. Maybe you've worked in or jammed in ensembles where your fiddle and mando and banjo friends know how to make room for a guitar in the band-wall-of-sound. Even so, you've found that anything subtle on the guitar is hard to sell in a band or jam session, hard to make it blend and also stand out from the crowd.

Ah, but the solo player has it different. Everything you play stands out, every move you make hangs out there in space for every ear in the room to hear. So you practice up on some cool move on the guitar, you rip it off perfectly in a performance, and instead of getting lost, it works, your audience hears it, and it sounds beautiful, original, interesting, and satisfying. If you're a real guitar person, somebody who loves the sound of the thing, and somebody who loves to make guitar music in a solo situation, a moment like the above is a great moment, worth getting out of bed to experience on a given day.

Of course the solo player runs a risk that goes along with the possible glory: if you reach for a cool move on the guitar and miss, the failure also stands out in mid-air for all to hear. Oh yes, one of the loneliest places on earth is behind a microphone with a guitar in your hands. Which, in a roundabout way brings us back to crosspicking.

Crosspicking is one of the best techniques to add to your arsenal as a solo player. It's flexible, works fast or slow, adds tremendous interest and variety, and it's fun to execute. Oh, and one thing more: it's a refreshing change from the just-one-more-flatted-fifth-hot-lick school of variations in your playing. What we undertake here today is to look at the basics. If you want the graduate school of crosspicking, multiple patterns, bizarre pick directions, and a world-music sort of analysis, the guy to learn from is my friend and partner, Beppe Gambetta. Or, buy the Brad Davis materials from this publication and learn of another stratospheric version of crosspicking. But before you do either, to get started, listen up to today's lesson and get enough material to keep you busy for a couple of years as we take on crosspicking, especially for solo players.

At its most basic, crosspicking is an arpeggio, playing across the strings of a partial chord, like a guitar finger-picker or a three-finger banjo player. We begin with a pattern or two, which I want you to memorize, playing it over and over, until it gets to be automatic. This is important, because before the pattern becomes automatic, it's just too much trouble, and no fun. Of course there are other patterns, but this is one of the most basic and flexible, so we begin here. It's called the "In The Mood" pattern, and it's demonstrated in Ex. 1. On this issue's audio CD, I demonstrate how it works. But note carefully on the tab the direction of the pick: in this pattern the pick continues its up-down movement following the rule of picking down on beats 1, 2, 3, 4 and up on "and" after each quarter-time beat. Because the pattern runs the pick over three strings of a chord, the even number of picking directions and the odd number of strings produces a very nice syncopation (again, listen UP to the audio CD).

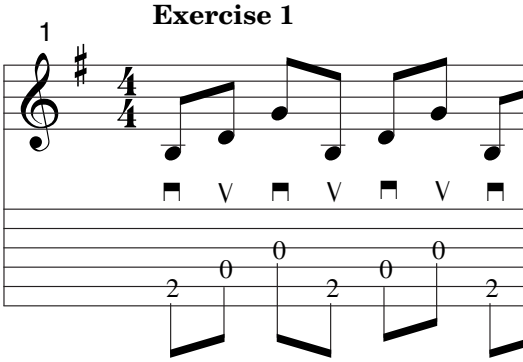
When you can play the little phrase so it actually sounds like "In The Mood" (ITM), then pay attention to the right hand and how it feels to play this, so that it becomes a memorized and automatic pattern. It's the memorized pattern that is going to be valuable to us. When the pattern is more or less automatic, then do this: first, change what the left hand is fingering to some other triad or chord (actually any three notes on three strings that sound good together) and secondly, pick the ITM pattern while you make small variations in the triad. Ex. 2 shows a treble-string triad played with the ITM pattern; Ex 3 shows the same thing with variations. But the best variations will be the ones you discover for yourself: any key, any three notes, any variations. This is where my old saw that everybody teaches herself or himself how to play the guitar kicks in: the more of these triad/chords and variations you find, the more you've advanced toward being a more interesting, more prepared guitar player.

Cheers…

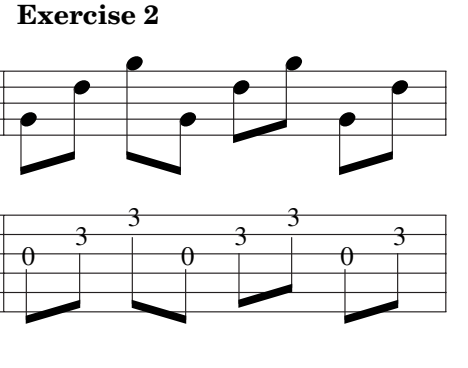
Editor's Note: Dan's column for this issue included several other crosspicking examples, however, the audio which accompanied the text and examples ran too long for us to include on the audio CD for this issue. As a result, I have divided this article into two parts. The remainer of Dan's crosspicking examples will appear in the next issue. Stay tuned!

Audio CD
Tracks 23

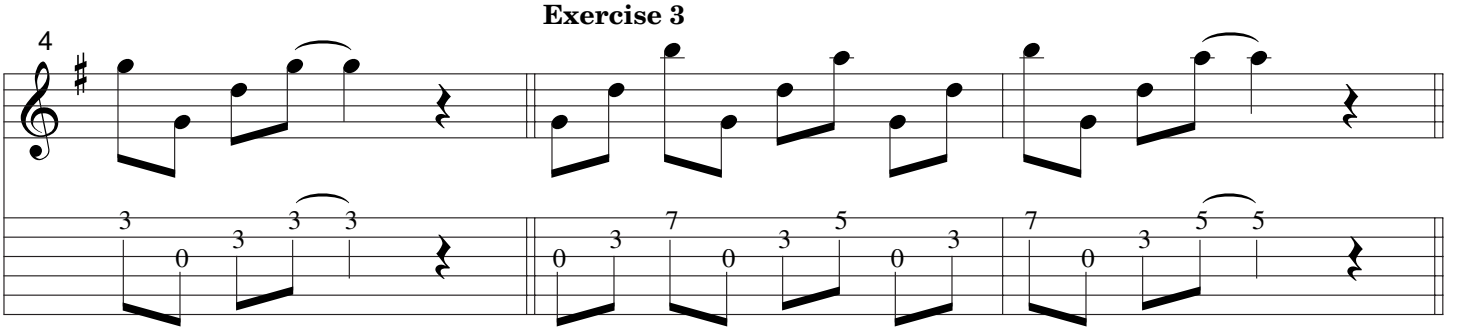
Exercise 1



Exercise 2



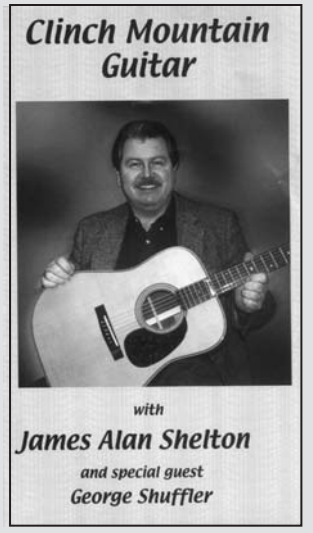
Exercise 3



⬒ =downstroke V =upstroke

Clinch Mountain Guitar with James Shelton

In this one-hour instructional video James Alan Shelton and special guest George Shuffler demonstrate and teach the guitar techniques that helped change the role of the guitar in bluegrass music. James and George display their crosspicking talents on "Katy Dear," and "Banks of the Ohio," and George demonstrates his solo to "Will You Miss Me." James interviews George regarding his crosspicking technique and then James teaches "Rank Stranger," "Uncloudy Day," "Bury Me Beneath the Willow," "Wildwood Flower," "Road To Coeburn," and "Tom's Creek." A tab book accompanies the video.



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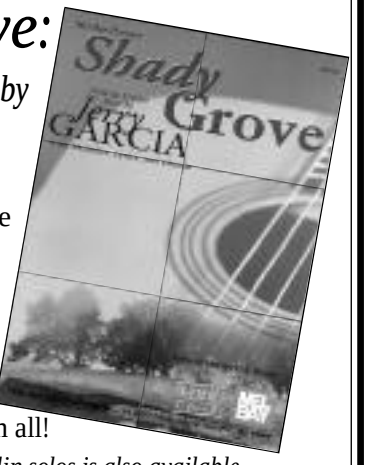

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JAM TUNES

Mike Maddux and Gary Cook: "Sail Away Ladies"

Our "Jam Tunes" feature for this issue comes to us from Mike Maddux and Gary Cook. I had asked Mike and Gary to be a part of the new compilation CD we are now preparing called *Flatpicking Favorites: Hot and Spicy*. For this project I asked pairs of today's top flatpickers to play a standard flatpick tune in duo. When Gary and Mike sat down to record, they played three tunes. The tune that we include here in this "Jam Tunes" column, "Sail Away Ladies," is not the tune we picked to be included on the CD (we picked their rendition of "Panhandle Rag"), but it was too good to dispose of so I asked Gary and Mike if it would be OK to use it as this issue's "Jam Tune."

Mike sat down and played one of his solo's slow for the audio CD, and tabbed out that solo for inclusion in the magazine. On the audio CD you will hear Mike's slow version, and then you will hear Gary and Mike jam.

Mike had this to say about the recording of this tune:

"It was a pleasure to sit down with Gary Cook and get a chance to play some straight-ahead flatpick tunes. "Sail Away Ladies" is a tune that isn't played all that often, but has a really nice melody and some interesting changes (the Am/Em combination is a nice departure from the I-IV-V sequence found in so many bluegrass tunes).

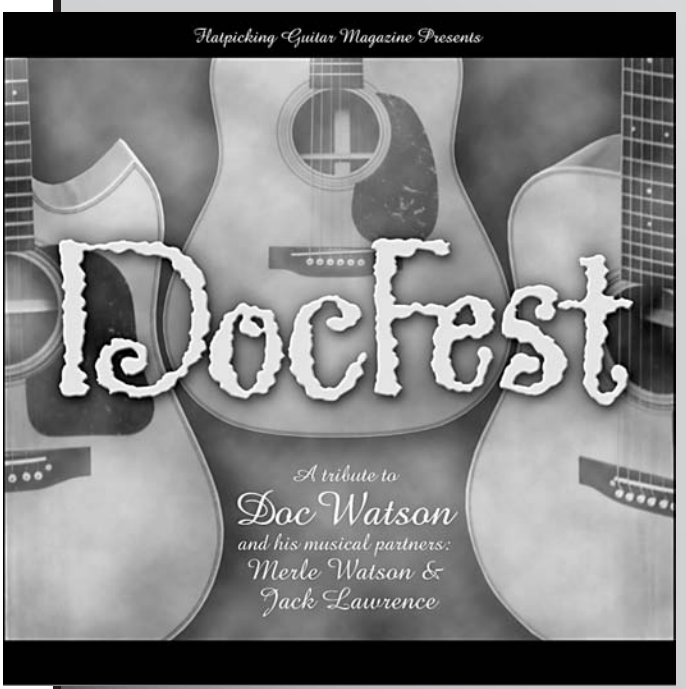
Gary and I had not found the opportunity to pick together for a couple of years. This was the first tune that we laid down and is mostly pure improv. Hope you enjoy playing and hearing "Sail Away Ladies."

Flatpicking Guitar Magazine pays tribute to

Doc Watson, Merle Watson & Jack Lawrence

with the release of a new musical tribute CD:

This CD includes eighteen tunes by many of today's top flatpickers. Each of the artist on this project were inspired to learn the song that they perform after first hearing the song performed by Doc Watson with one of his musical partners Merle Watson or Jack Lawrence. The CD includes Fourteen Vocals Songs and Four Instrumental Tunes as follows:



Gonna Lay Down My Old Guitar (Doug Rorrer & Steve Kilby)
Reuben's Train (Dix Bruce & Jim Nunally)
Old Camp Meeting Time (Kenny & Amanda Smith)
Deep River Blues (Jim Hurst & Missy Raines)
Salt Creek/Bill Cheathum (Wyatt Rice, Tim Stafford & Rushad Eggleston)
Alberta/Billy In The Lowground (Orrin Star & Russell Scholle)
Train That Carried My Girl From Town (Brad Davis & Whitewater)
Way Downtown (John Tindel & RST)
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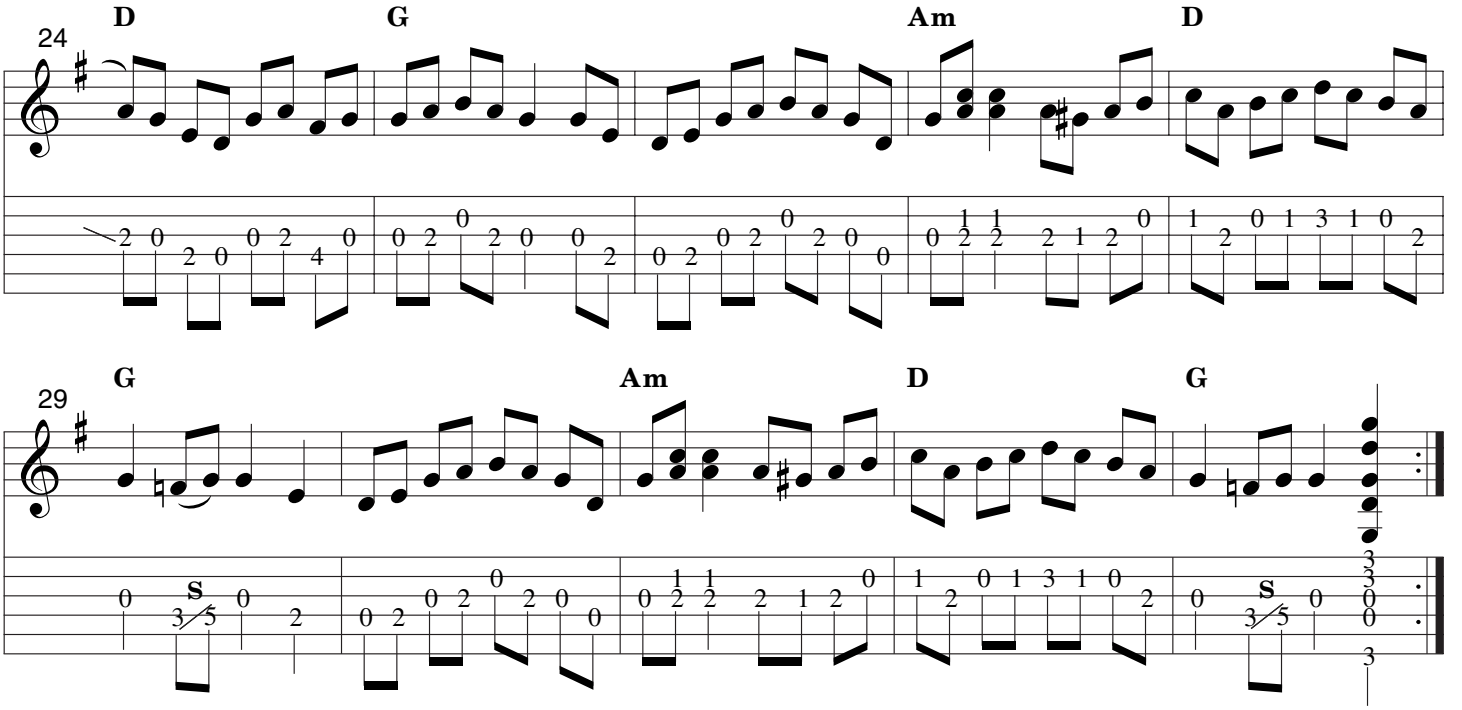
Audio CD
Track 25-27

Sail Away Ladies

Arranged by Mike Maddux

Sail Away Ladies (con't)



Sean Watkins
26 MILES
sean watkins
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Guitarist extraordinaire Sean Watkins returns with his eagerly anticipated second solo release. As the guitarist in Nickel Creek, Sean contributes elegantly powered rhythm guitar, mesmerizingly fluid lead guitar and a large percentage of the songwriting to their unique, progressive acoustic sound. 26 MILES features everything from loops, piano, horns, drums, vintage keyboards, bassoon to a string quartet. 26 MILES features three instrumentals and ten vocal tracks.
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Gypsy Jazz Guitar

by Paul Mehling

This month, at the request of many goal-oriented guitarists, we'll work on an actual tune and make it a technical exercise as well. This type of study is very common to those of you who have ever taken lessons—most teachers will give you technical stuff and musical stuff to work on. The good teachers (ahem) will give you music that is technically challenging and which, when mastered, will improve your playing (that's the reason to work on technique). I mention this because new statistics released by the US Census Bureau have shown that many guitar players never receive adequate training in technique or theory, yet they complain about a certain lack of enjoyment (which often leads to less time spent with the guitar). To the rescue now, with the first of many musical vitamins which (when taken daily) will make your playing bigger and stronger (and more musical). Find yourself a recording of Reinhardt (or someone like him) playing "Appel Indirect"—it's a goofy tune based on "I Got Rhythm" changes (more or less) that is built upon the simple riff on a C6 chord at the 5th fret.

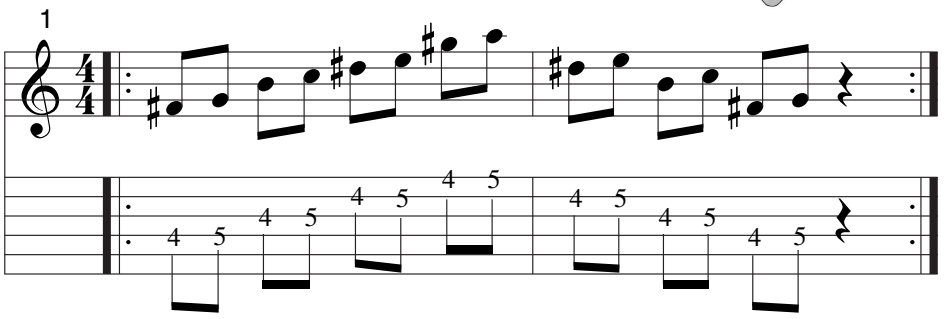
This is all played with the first and second finger. At first you may need to just hammer each pair of notes, but ideally you'll want to hit each note with the pick. Depending upon your level of skill, you'll find making each note sound the same as the last and making it flow to be quite difficult to do smoothly and evenly. That's why it's really great to start out by listening to Django do it. I remember playing this

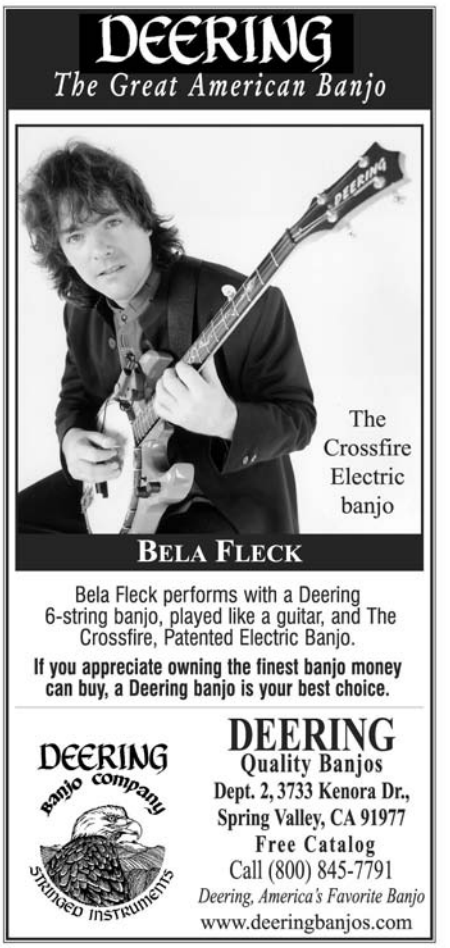
for the first time. It wasn't easy—but with practice (and I mean every day!) it comes along pretty quickly. Playing with just two fingers is surprisingly difficult and a fascinating insight into how our crippled hero could do so much with seemingly so little. You may find that you cannot do this evenly. It may take some time, and chances are that you'll find the other pairs of fingers (2 & 3, 3 & 4, 1 & 3, 2 & 4, 1 & 4) are even worse at this simple task. That's okay! Remember, it'll come with time, and when you get it down your playing will be more accurate and slamming with rhythm and that, like the song says, is what it's all about.

The technical discovery here is that these are chromatic approach tones, notes that are not in the "scale" or "key"' that the tune is in. If you played a C major scale you'd only find the chord tones, while the half-steps below each chord tone are the chromatic tones which approach the chord tones. Get it? Any questions? Email me! (QuestionsforPazzo@hcsf.com)

Appel Indirect

Audio CD Track 24

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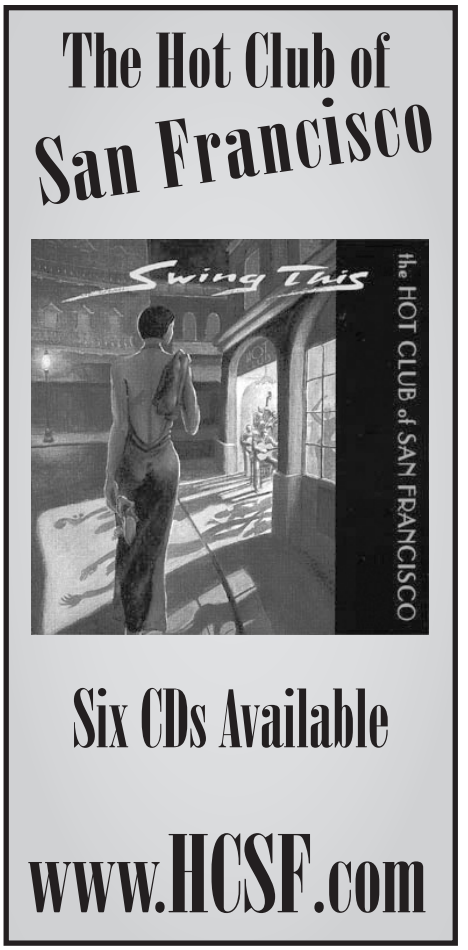

This technique can be used on any chord in any song. It all depends on your fingers being able to play it and your mind's ear being able to hear how it will fit (think before you play!). Now, if you want to grow yourself (be your own teacher and save $$) try making up your own etudes (or studies) using chromatic approach tones. Try playing a half-step below each note in a C major chord. Now try it in two octaves, going up (ascending) and going down (descending, duh…) Now try three octaves! If you can do three octave arpeggios with chromatic approach tones it's time for you to call me for private lessons! So few students ever get this far, yet this is just the tip of the iceberg of Gypsy style! There's plenty more, stay tuned!

Paul Mehling (aka Pazzo) is the leader of the notorious Hot Club of San Francisco, with 7 CDs in 11 years and constant appearances all over the planet. On the music scene in Northern California all of his life, his dedication to jazz, especially Gypsy-Swing has is some small way, hopefully made the world a safer place for music. www.HCSF.com

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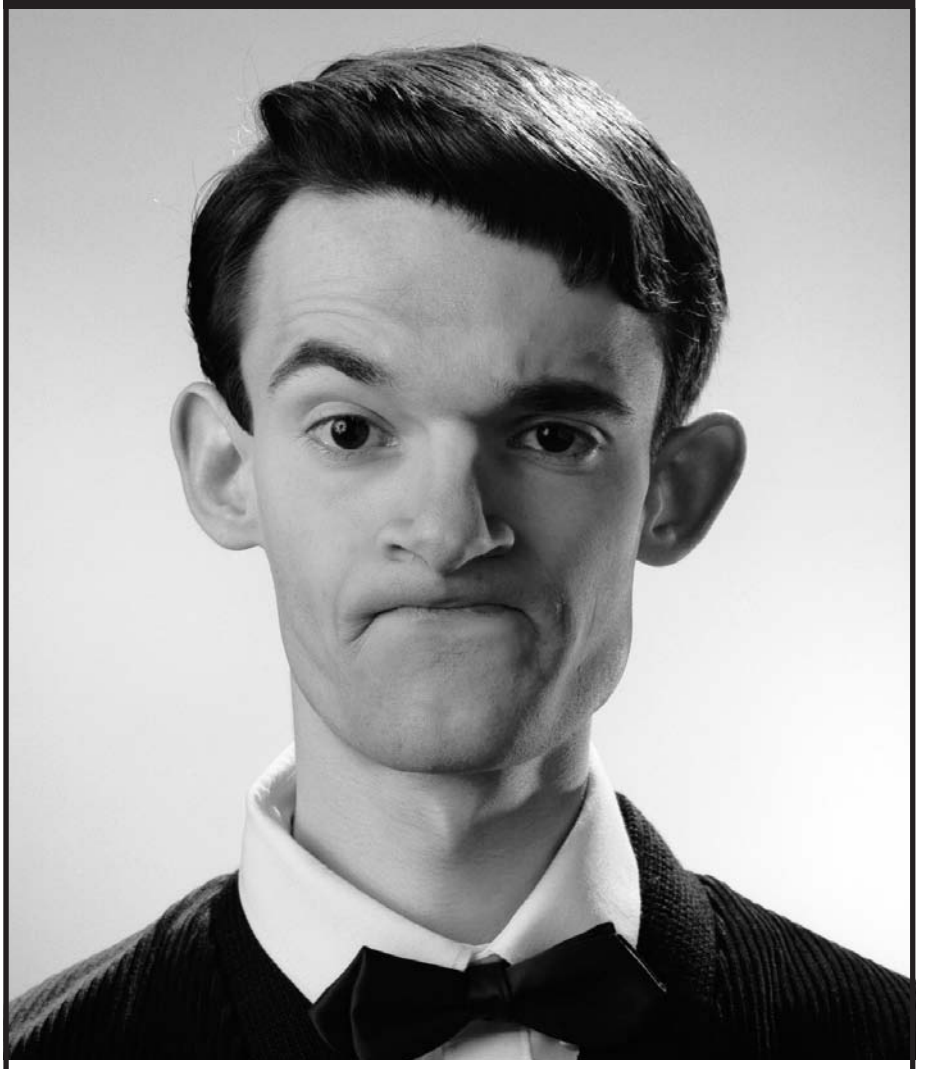

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THE O-ZONE

by Orrin Star

Hard Times

Stephen Foster's "Hard Times Come Again No More" is one of those bedrock songs that manages to enchant every folk performer at some point in their musical lives. Artists ranging from Dylan to Tim O'Brien to Maura O'Connell have recorded it (along with dozens more) and not long ago, after transcribing it for a student, I found myself under its spell as well.

At my flatpicking workshops I'm sometimes asked how much I practice or if I have a practice routine that I recommend. I don't. The playing I do on my own varies day-to-day and is mostly song driven; when I am learning (or writing) a tune that excites me it usually takes over my being for a time and I end up playing it over and over and over (as was the case with "Hard Times"). But somehow—between those interludes of being smitten with a tune; the eight to ten hours a week I spend teaching; some rehearsing with the guys I perform with locally; and warming up before gigs—I manage to maintain my svelte playing figure.

The lyrics for "Hard Times" have an antiquated, almost Victorian quality that contributes to its charm. Here is the second verse followed by the chorus:

While we seek mirth and beauty and music light and gay,
There are frail forms fainting at the door
Though their voices are silent, their pleading looks will say
Oh hard times come again no more

'Tis the song, the sigh of the weary,
Hard times, hard times, come again no more
Many days you have lingered around my cabin door;
Oh hard times come again no more.

As with many of my solo song treatments, this arrangement draws liberally from Norman Blake's lead notes-punctuated-by-strums-and-bursts-of-crosspicking approach. It is a style that brings to mind the phrase "it's simple but it ain't easy." The notes themselves are not particularly complex, but getting them to flow together properly requires a finesse and a sensitivity that eludes many players. But it is oh so satisfying to get right. So I'm going to spend more time than usual detailing the techniques involved.

First off, as I've noted before, the most important thing in solos like this is to make sure that your lead notes are picked like lead notes and that your strums are strummed like real strums. Your right hand needs to continually alternate its orientation in order to achieve these two very distinct sounds. (And in order to highlight this important distinction, I have tweaked the tab: strums are indicated by the addition of up and down arrows on the timing lines below the notes.)

A second skill that is required in abundance is the playing of "double-stops"--dual lead notes picked simultaneously. They add real meatiness and color to a solo. But you need to angle your pick just so (that is, starting straight up, at a right angle to the top of the guitar, and then arcing upward away from you) in order to strike the two target strings articulately as lead notes (not as strums or some mushy hybrid) while avoiding any neighboring strings.

A third technique that is called on occurs most prominently on the D9 chord and the G that follows three notes later: a group rest stroke that I call a "rake" or a "'push." You need to tilt your pick forward (down away from you), stiffen your wrist, and then quickly push down across the indicated strings. This makes those chords ring in a distinctly loud and powerful way.

Note that while you play the full D9 in the solo, you only play two notes over the Cdim; the full chord is only used when you're playing rhythm.

Another chordal subtlety: I employ two F forms in this solo—a full and a partial one—and in both I leave the high E string open. (Technically, this is an F major 7th. But I keep it really subtle, making sure that the open E is an afterthought in my strumming and never emphasized. That adds a plaintive quality that I think enhances the mood of the song.) I've indicated the first appearance of each of these F chords in the tab.

This partial F always occurs in tandem with an open-to-second fret middle finger hammer-on on the third string. Your ring finger should always hammer open-to-third fret on the D string at the same time, even though it's not explicitly indicated.

In working up this song, I found myself sometimes opting for a higher, more crosspicked version of the second half of the chorus. Using appropriate connective licks, I have devised an arrangement that appends this higher second half onto my regular chorus, so that you may partake of its majesty as well (not to mention a cool ending lick). Which leads us to one last subtlety: you'll notice that there are two spare sets of strums in this last section of the tab that appear in parentheses. These are what I call "timing strums"—strums that are hit so lightly as to be almost subliminal. They are used simply to help you keep time and avoid silence. Think of them as whispered strums.

This is a magical song. May it take you away as well.

"Brooklyn Bluegrass Maestro" Orrin Star is an award-winning guitar, banjo and mandolin player. The 1976 National Flatpicking Champion, he has toured and recorded widely, appeared on A Prairie Home Companion *and is the author of* Hot Licks for Bluegrass Guitar. *See www.flatpick.com/ostar.*

Audio CD
Track 29

Hard Times

Arranged by Orrin Star

Hard Times (con't)

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Dark Hollow

by Dix Bruce

Jim Nunally and I have a new CD from FGM Records, *Brothers at Heart*. With this CD, we get back to the roots of our favorite music: just two guitars and two voices. As you might guess from the title, it's loaded with old time brother duet singing and guitar picking. If you like simple and straight forward singing and picking, you'll like *Brothers at Heart*.

There's a lot of guitar picking on the CD: a couple of hot instrumentals, some twin picking in harmony, some cross picking, and a lot of soloing on the vocal selections. Dan Miller asked me to transcribe a couple of our solos from the bluegrass standard "Dark Hollow" and talk a little about how Jim and I put the song together.

I transcribed Jim's first solo, which kicks off the tune, and my second solo, from about two minutes into the song.

Jim and I have played together for almost ten years and we've covered a variety of music in many different situations and venues. When we sat down to record *Brothers at Heart*, we didn't have a pre-arranged list of songs. We just sat down in front of the microphones and tried a few things that came to mind, drawing from our many hours of playing together.

I don't believe we'd rehearsed most of the material on the CD prior to recording it, but we had played "Dark Hollow" a few times, having both learned it from recordings by the Kentucky Colonels. Not rehearsing before a recording session is often a recipe for studio disaster—financial if not artistic—and I don't recommend it to anyone. We did it because we were pressed for time. Both of us had been traveling and were quite busy with other projects. We had a window of a few days and wanted to see what we'd come up with. So, we sat down and blocked the tunes out, deciding who would sing what and where and who would play what and where.

As we rehearsed a time or two before turning on the recorder, I remember the distinct feeling of "Dark Hollow" finally falling into place and becoming a set piece. We began to understand how we were going to approach the tune both vocally and instrumentally, rhythm-wise and lead-wise. At a certain point we both kind of clicked, relaxed, forgot about remembering the arrangement, and got on with it. We did the best we could and then went on to the next song.

One of the things that I found interesting about the process of developing the guitar solos was that we started "borrowing" licks and melodic phrases, even rhythmic ideas, from each other. I'd never been aware of that in the past—Jim plays like he plays, I play like I play— but it must be happening all the time. One example is the ninth full measure of Jim's solo. He plays a descending, kind of double stop thing that I find myself almost always playing in one or the other of my solos in the song.

Also, we tended to "compose" the solos as the session coalesced. I think we recorded three takes, and by the third, each of our solos had a set theme. We changed things here and there, swapped measures and licks, but each solo had its own beginning, middle, and end. We've retained these general approaches to the solos and I've noticed that when we perform "Dark Hollow" live, we tend to at least allude to these recorded solos, if not play them pretty much intact. I find that interesting because we put this song together so quickly with no intention of nailing down any of the parts in this way. We simply found things that worked and tried to get them down on tape as cleanly as possible in the given amount of time.

"Dark Hollow" is in the key of Bb, with both of us playing out of key of G position capoed at the third fret. This is a little unusual for Jim and I, since one of us will usually play without a capo or we'll capo at different frets to give a variety of timbres to the two guitars. For example, on "Banks of the Ohio," I capoed at the fourth fret and played the lead out of C while Jim capoed strings 1-5 at the second fret, left the sixth string uncapoed, and played out of the key of D. This effectively gave him the sound of a "dropped D" tuning or a lowered sixth string tuning. (You can download a cross picking version of "Banks of the Ohio" from my website.)

Let's look at Jim's solo. We use it as an instrumental introduction to the song. It's a good melodic representation of the melody to "Dark Hollow." However, Jim spices up the basic melody with several "blue" notes (M 1-3), which relative to the key of G are Bb and F natural, and many left hand slides, hammer-ons, and pull-offs (M1-3, etc.).

I noted in the music that when Jim does play chord strums as part of his solo, they are very light, almost whispers. When I transcribed my solo, I found that I was doing a similar thing. It brings up an interesting issue of playing in a duo with another acoustic guitar player. With just two acoustic stringed instruments the natural tendency is to play more and to play louder. After all, it's just the two of you against the world and since no acoustic guitar is very loud to begin with, isn't more better?

In our case, we've found it isn't. Since the beginning, we've worked on simplifying our sound, trying to take away the extraneous bits to leave a crisp groove with a clear down-beat and back-beat. If we're both mashing on the same bass note or the same chord strum at the same time, in the same register, the music gets muddy. Over time we've defined the sound we're after and usually pull back on just about everything to get it. We still work a lot on playing rhythm that builds the sound rather than disperses it. Sometimes I just play a rhythm chop, like a mandolin, behind singing or Jim's leads. When we solo, we rarely play loud strums in between the lead notes since the other guy is already doing it. Often one of us finger picks. We try out different parts and compromise trying to find a mutually agreed to middle ground.

By the time I played my second solo about two minutes into the song, we'd sung verses and choruses several times, Jim

had played the solo above, plus another, and I had played my first solo. By that point in the song, the melody is pretty well established in the listener's ear and I felt it was OK to step out a bit. Although I didn't plan it this way at the session, as I look at the solo now, I realize I used some licks (M19, 20), a few blue notes (M 22, 24-26), and syncopation (M 28, 30-31) to make up a new melody that kind of telegraphed the chord changes if not the original melody of the song.

As interesting as it is for me to look back at this recording and discuss it, it's also a little strange. As I transcribed my own solo, I was surprised at what I played. It wasn't at all like I'd remembered. At a few spots I thought "Gee, I didn't mean to play that" or "I was going for something else" or "I thought I put that in the other solo."

In transcribing Jim's solo, I was surprised to see sounds I've heard over the years written down on paper. It was enlightening to see pieces of his musical vocabulary separated out and then to follow how he assembled them into a solo. I found myself thinking "Oh, that's how he played that lick!" As I saw the licks written out and associated fret positions with sounds I'd heard I better understood his playing.

If you've read my column for any length of time, you know that I'm a true believer in the value of taking the time to transcribe solos, whether they're yours or someone else's, whether they're guitar solos or saxophone solos. By going through the process of listening to music and attempting to figure it out and write it down, you will learn volumes about how others play, how they make the sounds that you hear, and how you can play those sounds. Any time you spend transcribing will be time well spent. Don't get hung up on transcribing a lick or solo perfectly in one sitting. Do the best you can and over time your skill will improve. Get a bound music notebook, write the music or TAB out as best you can, and come back to it over weeks, months, or years. Over time you'll train your ears to hear better and that will in turn improve your playing.

Want more solos to play? I've just posted my Musix Newsletter 2 with guitar solos for "Shady Grove" (flat picking) and "Banks of the Ohio" (crosspicking) on my website (http://www.musixnow.com/newsletter2.html). You can listen to recordings of the tunes, download sound clips, and print tab from the site. I plan to post new newsletters from time to time with songs and licks, solos and playing tips. This latest edition also includes three mandolin tunes. Check it out.

Brothers at Heart by Dix Bruce & Jim Nunally is available online from http://www.musixnow.com or http://www.fgmrecords.com. You can preview sound clips from several of the songs on both sites. Dix also recorded and produced Prof. Elvo D'Amante's comprehensive and excellent 12-CD, three-volume ear training course. Available through Musix, PO Box 231005, Pleasant Hill, CA 94523 and www.musixnow.com where exercises can be previewed and ordered online.

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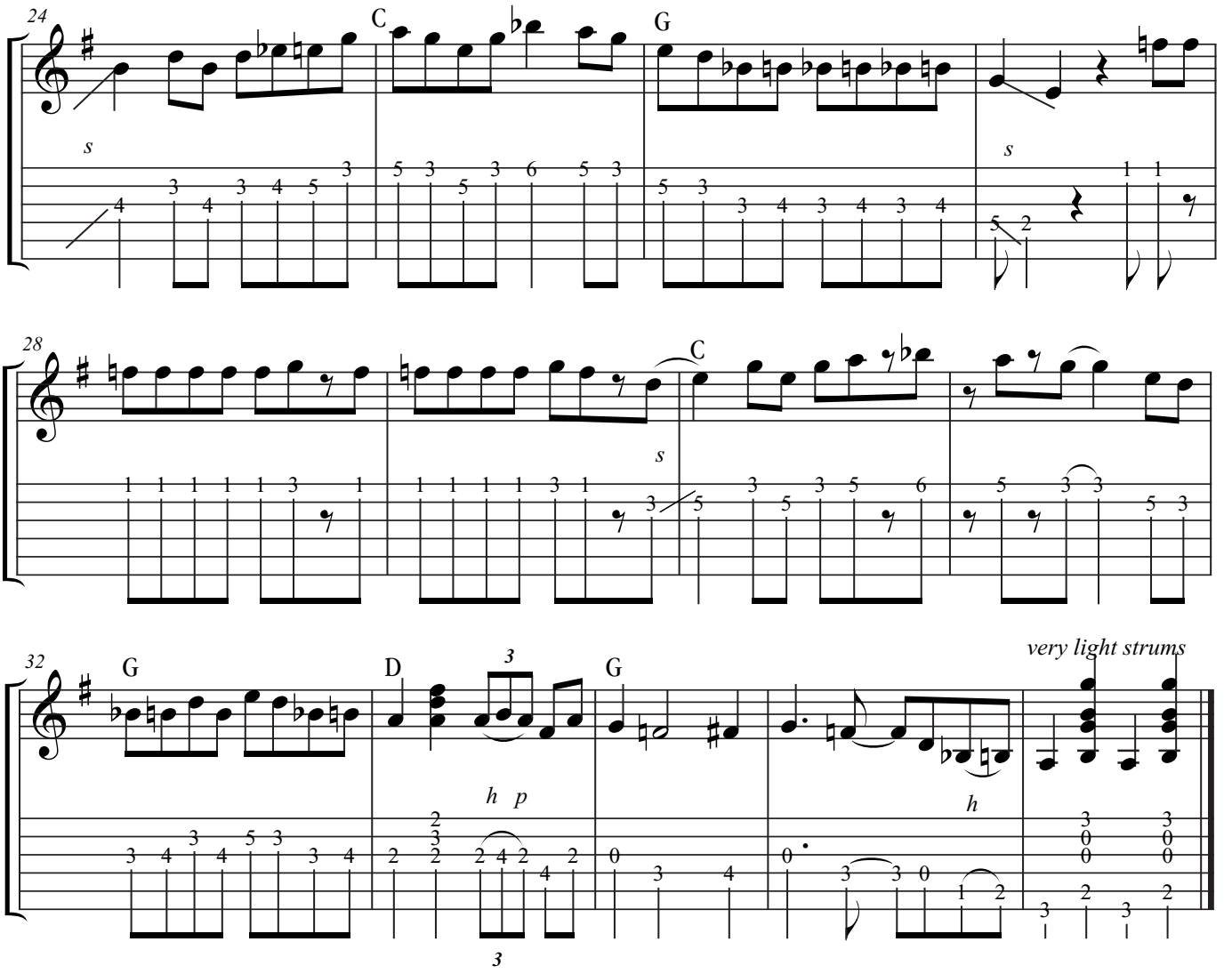
Audio CD
Tracks 31-33

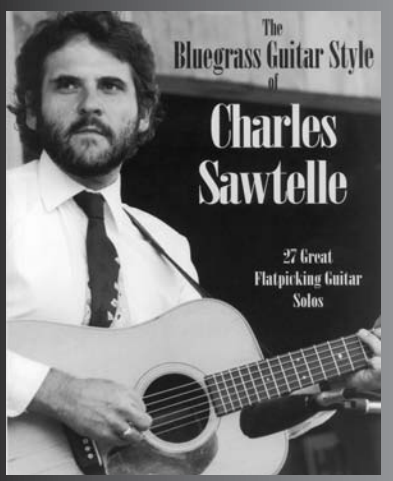
Dark Hollow

Arranged by Dix Bruce

Capo 3

Dark Hollow (con't)





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Music Theory:
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Technical Studies for Flatpickers

by Michel A. Maddux

Red campfire embers glow, providing dim illumination for the late-night Winfield pickin' session. Randy Howard is laughing and tearing up the fiddle on every tune called and switches between guitar, fiddle, and mandolin with equal ease. Great musicians, each bringing his own approach to great sessions.

More than once I have been struck by each player's different style, and how each musician chooses what to play in a given situation. There's a constant variation of technique, from virtuoso fiddlers like Randy Howard and Don Lewis to the simple elegance of Pete Rowan and Charles Sawtelle.

Fancy vs. Simple

John Hartford sang that "style is based on limitations." Some of the most powerful music that I have ever heard is also fairly simple. While I suspect that every reader of *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine* would like to be a virtuoso on the guitar, each of us can play great music while on the road to virtuosity.

Because of my own limitations, I choose to do things in a certain way. So, over the years I came up with some simple rules on how to make music.

Rule 1: Don't play over your head!

The time to work out material that is beyond your present technical ability is in the practice room, not on stage under the lights. Know the melody cold. You need to be able to play it properly no matter what is going on around you.

When you are in the spotlight, make certain that what you are going to do has all the 5 "Ts"—tuning, tone, timing, taste, and touch. Conversely, work your tail off in the practice room to be ready to play new, exciting, music.

Rule 2: Simplify

Knowing how to simplify your break and your rhythm is the single most important thing that you can learn! Stay out of the way of the rest of the band and make certain that the notes that you play for your break are just right, not a bunch of "trash" licks strung together. I try to have at least two versions of a tune, one for a moderate tempo and another that works at a faster speed. Without exception, the only way that I can play tunes at the fast tempo is to simplify.

A great example of different versions of flatpicking tunes is Steve Kaufman's *Parking Lot Pickers* Series. Steve put together every tune with three different versions: the basic, simple melody; an intermediate level break; and an advanced version. All of these show great guitar technique, and are great tunes to study for your own development.

You can either play them as is or as a way to begin to improvise and create your own version. For example, play through all of the versions, memorize all of version 1, and then pick out sections of versions 2 and 3 that work for your style.

Keep working on the tune until you can play it perfectly, until you forget where it originated and it is all yours.

Rule 3: Keepin' it together!

Make your sense of timing rock solid by working out rhythm and solos with a metronome. Don't be one of those players who takes off on a break and either drags or rushes the tune, completely changing the groove that the rest of the group established. Practice your scales and rhythm every day with a metronome.

Rule 4: Make them tones sound right!

Getting a good tone out of the guitar is not the easiest thing in the world to do, but it might be the most important rule of all. A few simple notes, played with good tone, will carry a tune better than a hundred trashy, thuppy, noisy licks.

Rule 5: If you got it, flaunt it!

If you are a virtuoso, God bless you, let's hear it! When you can flawlessly pull off the most difficult licks with good tone, in time, and show respect for the style of the music, that's as good as it gets!

Keep growing, keep pickin', and keep trying to find your own voice.

Toward Improved Technique and Ear Training - 6's and 9's

The exercises included today will help your touch, and will help you find the right notes. When you play a song that has a "6" chord, a "sus 4", or a "7th," you need to know which notes are going to fit, and which notes won't work.

Play this exercise with the metronome, observing the strict down-up right hand technique, and at the top of each passage, say aloud which scale degree sounds. For example, "flat 3 (that is, minor)" (or major third, 4th, 5th, 6th, dominant 7th, major 7th, octave, flat 9th, 9th, sharp 9th, 11th, 13th, and so on). Get used to hearing the sound of those intervals so that when you play a tune with a 9th, you have trained your ear to hear it, and your fingers to play it.

Note that exercise 1 plays notes that fit within the various C chords (the minor, major, sus 4, maj 7th, dominant 7th, 9th, 11th, 13th). Starting always on the root, the low C, play the scale form.

Also, practice playing the flat 9th, then play the 9th, then play the sharp 9th. Do this with the sharp 11th as well, and note that the notes of 9-11-13 are the 2-4-6 scale degree notes, an octave higher! For your reference, I included the names of chords that you might use over these notes. Play each measure as a "mini" exercise until you have the different sound of the notes in your ears.

Once you have the basic ideas down, experiment. Play the minor 7 form using the flat 3rd and the flat 7th. Try a scale with a minor 7 flat 5, or a minor 9. See how that sounds. Do this same exercise for the keys of G, A, and D, and for every scale form that you know.

Do this every day—and your ear and your fingers are both going to improve.

A few additional comments: the chords that I wrote were add9, and add11th. That is because the scale form was using the major 7th, instead of the dominant (or flat) 7th. To play a run against a C9 chord, you would play the flat 7th; likewise for the 11th and 13th. Likewise, the full minor scale for C minor uses Bb, Eb, and Ab.

It seems likely that there are some who are wondering if these notes, scales, and chords are legit for the bluegrass style. I suggest that you think about the use of 9 chords, 11s, 6s, and so on in Texas swing, or in some of the Django material presented in an earlier issue of FGM. These altered and extended chords and scales are standard in the modern bluegrass repertoire.

On to the tune!

"Hamilton Country Breakdown," a great bluegrass tune that I learned from the playing of Byron Berline, has that great bluegrass 7 change—the G to F—in the beginning. Watch the pull-offs, and the floaty stuff in the B section.

Have fun, and keep on pickin'!

Mike lives in Woodland Park, Colorado, where he plays bluegrass and jazz, writes, teaches, and studies music. Watch for his Bertye Maddux Band coming soon to a festival near you. You can visit Mike's web site at http://home.rmi.net/~madflatpicker01/index.html. You'll find the band's schedule, sound bytes, photos, and email addresses there. Drop him a line with questions or comments via email, or c/o this magazine.

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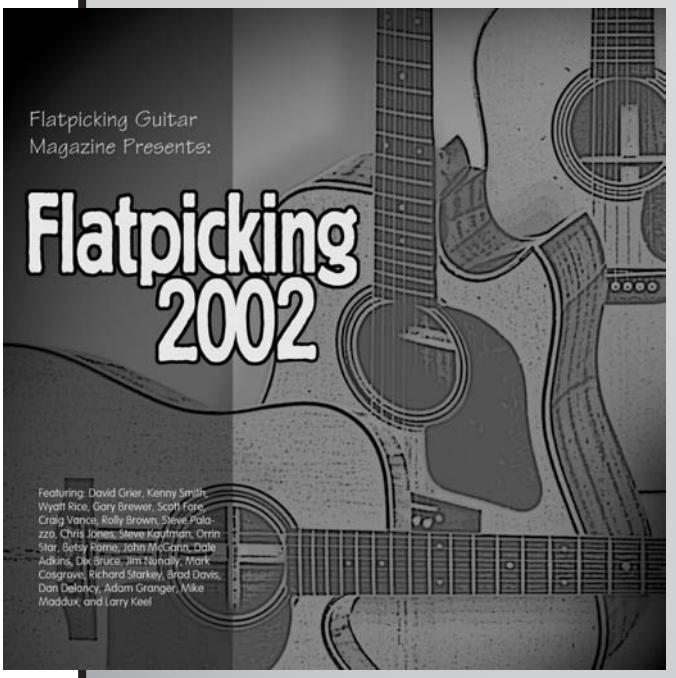
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Audio CD
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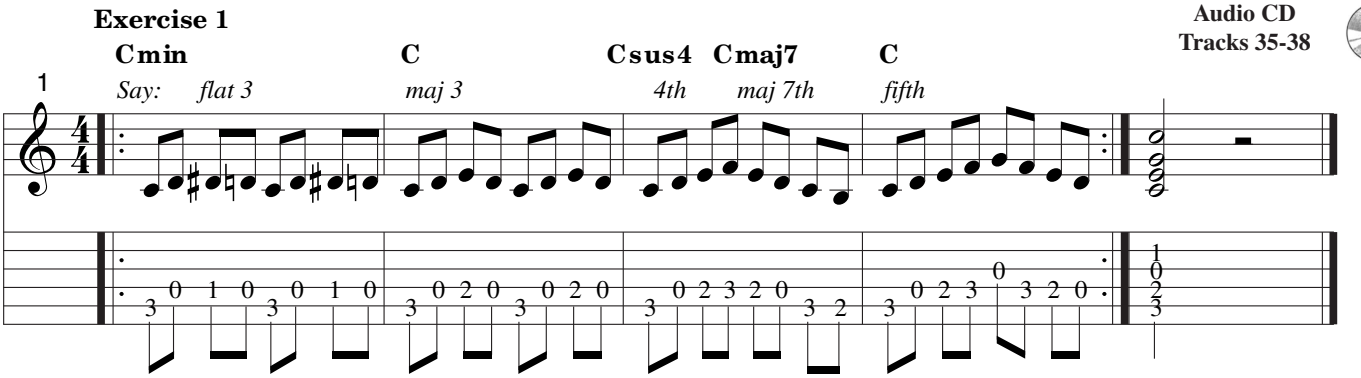
Exercise 1



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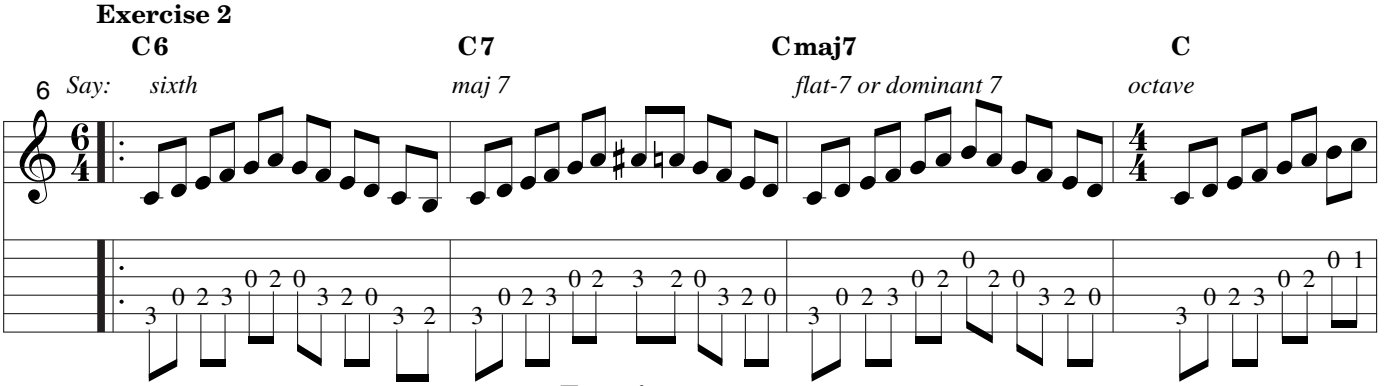

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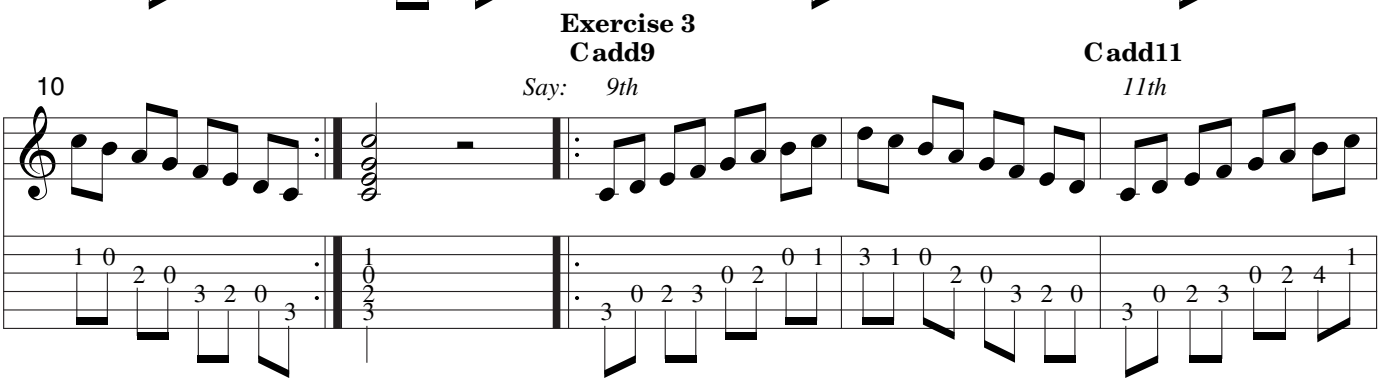
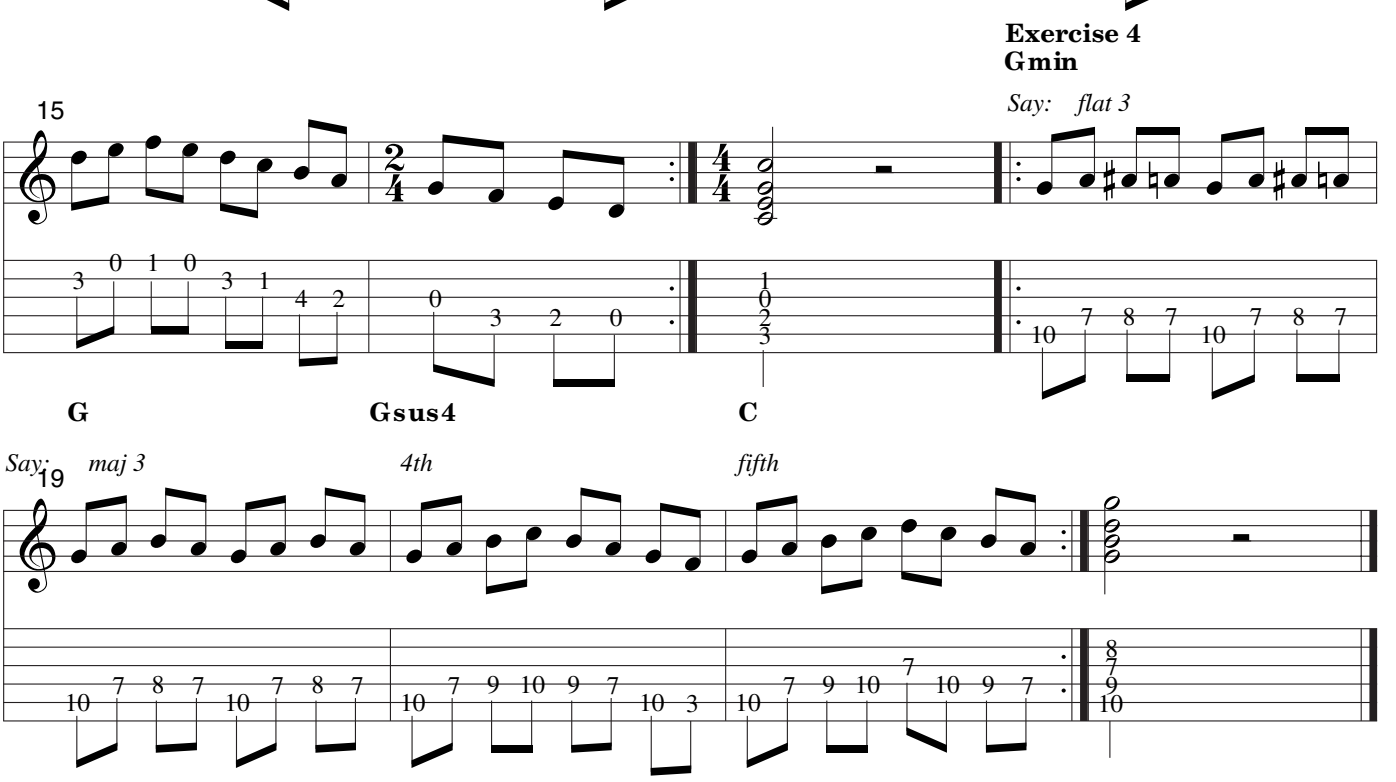


Exercise 4



Audio CD
Tracks 39-40

Hamilton County Breakdown

Arranged by Mike Maddux

Gospel Guitar

with Harold Streeter

Lord of the Dance & God is Watching Over Me

This time around, we have a double feature. The first song is "Lord of the Dance," a simple two-chord piece with a fiddle tune sound to it. The second tune is a 16-bar break for "God is Watching Over Me," a great bluegrass song recorded by Doyle Lawson.

"Lord of the Dance" is also known as "Simple Gifts." Originally a Shaker song, "Simple Gifts" is now popular with many congregations, and if you look it up in your hymnal, chances are equal of finding it under either name. At our church, however, it's played and sung so fast one almost has to be an auctioneer to sing it. Consequently, I didn't really care much for the piece until my wife and I heard a slower version of it at a local mall. It's on Craig Duncan's instrumental CD *Simple Faith*. Craig's a very fine hammered dulcimer, fiddle, and mandolin player, and "Lord of the Dance" is the first track on his CD. We've used Craig's more reasonable tempo on this issue's audio CD—the tempo allows you to sing the lyrics comfortably without having the feeling of rushing to keep up.

The arrangement here is a predominantly single-string treatment with a little Carter style thrown in. Consisting of a verse and refrain, the 16 bars of the tab are meant to function as a break.

If you haven't heard the second piece, "God is Watching Over Me," it's a good up-tempo bluegrass gospel tune to add to your repertoire. Aside from its wonderful message, what turned me on to it was Dale Perry's very fine, clean and simple banjo break.

However, Doyle Lawson's recording did not include a guitar break, so this is a concoction of mine, based on first-position G blues scale (G Bb C Db D F) in a pseudo-Tony Rice style. Crosspicking is also scattered throughout, with the first instance being the phrase beginning in measure 2 and continuing into measure 3. It's similar to the treatment Norman Blake uses in his version of "Man of Constant Sorrow" on the *O Brother Where Art Thou* soundtrack. You may want to spend extra time with measure 11, which gave me fits while recording the demo for this issue. Speaking of the demo, capo at the second fret for the key of A.

Hope you get some mileage out of both tunes, and as always, if you have any suggestions for future columns, send 'em on. Don't forget to pay us a visit at www.lewalt.com for the latest additions, one of which is a brand new page of band arrangements for "slow jams."

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Lord of the Dance

Arranged by Harold Streeter

Audio CD
Tracks 43-44

God is Watching Over Me

Arranged by Harold Streeter

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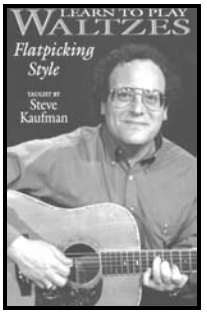

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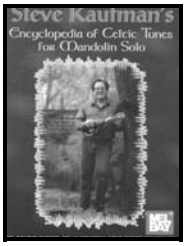

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The Burning of the Piper's Hut

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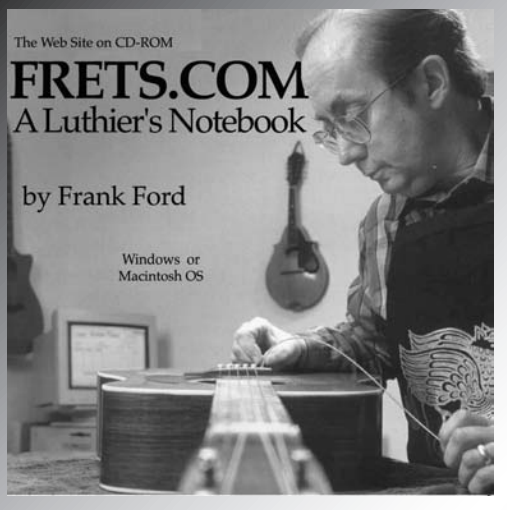

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PICKIN' FIDDLE TUNES

by Adam Granger

GETTING THERE IS HALF THE FUN. . .

Greetings, flatpick funsters everywhere. With the warm months come thoughts of vagabondery. I coined that word because the right word, "vagabondage", conjures disturbing images of hobos in lingerie tied to beds. At any rate, with thoughts of travel come thoughts of fiddle tunes with peripatetic names.

The Route is a nice, straight-ahead meat-and-potatoes blue-collar no-nonsense Republican cloth coat old-time tune in A. For those of you afflicted with capophobia, this works pretty slick in open position. Give it a try. (*N.B.* Capo-shedding is also good ear-finger training.) The ascetic reputation of this piece is supported by the fact that it is known only by this name. Not so our other two offerings. Hold on to your hats:

Paddy on the Turnpike is one of several tunes known by that name. This particular *Paddy* is one you may have heard: after an Irish birth and upbringing, it made the scene in bluegrassville *via* Byron Berline's seminal fiddle album (recorded with the Dillards as a backup band).* This tune has a number of names, all with travel themes: *Jenny on the Railroad* (Paddy's sister), *Paddy on the Handcar* (his Amtrak pass expired) and *Patty on the Turnpike* (a misspelling, no doubt) and *Bunch of Keys* (as in car keys). All right, let's press on; we're almost done!

The *Highway to Holburn* is a Dm Irish Reel also known as *Jenny's Welcome to Charlie* (Paddy's nephew), *Jennie and the Weasel* (a pejorative nickname; a lot of people didn't like Charlie) and *Jennie and the Weaver* (remember Charlie Weaver?).

All right, all right. We don't actually have anothing to indicate that Charlie was Paddy's nephew. Nor can we know if the Highway to Holburn was the Route that Paddy took when he was on the turnpike. And the odds are against our Charlie being Charlie Weaver. We can only speculate, and, since I lumped these three tunes together into the same column, I figured I'd just speculate them into one big pile as well. Okay, folks, speculatin's done; time to get to some *pickin'*.

READING *EASYTAB*

Easytab is like conventional tablature, except that timing notation has been streamlined and simplified. Since fiddle tunes are comprised mainly of eighth notes, *Easytab* uses the eighth note as its basic unit. An eighth rest is indicated by a dot. Therefore, a note with a dot after it is a quarter note, and a note with three dots after it is a half note. There are a total of eight notes and rests per measure.

FOR BEGINNERS

Pick with an alternating style: down-up-down-up-down-up etc. The first note of each measure should be a downstroke, the last an upstroke. **Include rests** in this alternating pattern. This keeps you "in synch", playing downstrokes on the beats, so that, no matter what the configuration of notes and rests in an eight-unit measure, the right hand plays them down-up-down-up-down-up-down-up.

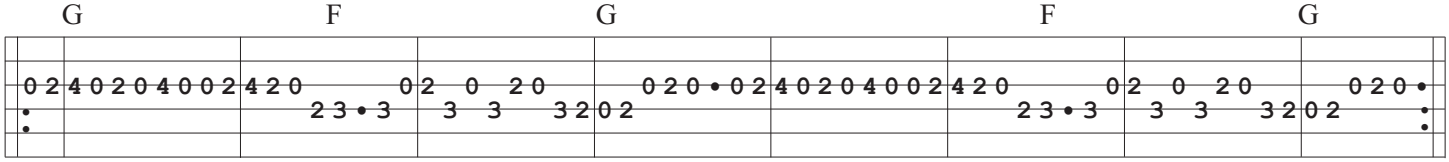
The Route is a no-frills tune played mostly in the first position. The fourth-fret G-string notes in the first part are B notes, and could be played as open B-string notes. I've chosen not to for two reasons: it's easier (because one doesn't have to switch strings), but more importantly, the tone of the notes is more homogeneous. Also, the sixth-fret B-string note at the end of the second part can be played as a first-fret E-string note. This requires, however, the ability to make a first-position five-fret reach, and you'll have to play the fifth-fret G-string note as a first-fret B-string note. Go for it.

THE ROUTE

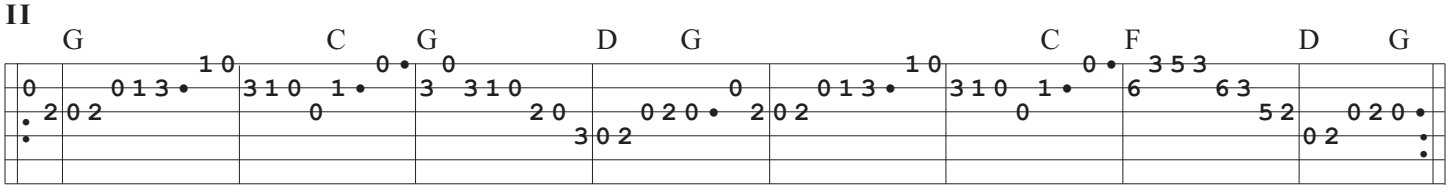
Audio CD
Track 47

KEY: A (CAPO 2)

I



II



*winner of this issue's *Diagram This Sentence* Award

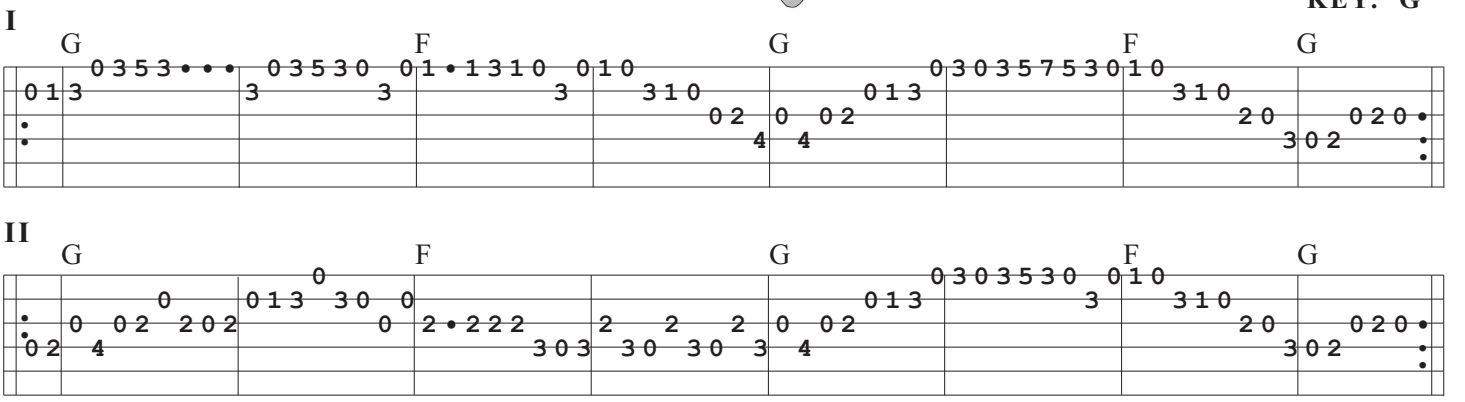
This version of *Paddy on the Turnpike* tips its hat in the general direction of the aforementioned Berline version. Note that we've got another five-fret-reach on our hands, in the sixth measure of the first part. Other than that, this is a first-position tune, albeit with the addition of lots of F notes (which happen, predictably, during the F chords). These notes occur in two octaves, and are on the first fret of the high E string and the third fret of the D string. You'll find an abundance of the former in the first part and the latter in the second.

Paddy on the Turnpike is a great jam tune because it only has two chords—F and G—and cycles fairly regularly between the two.

Audio CD
Track 48

PADDY ON THE TURNPIKE

KEY: G

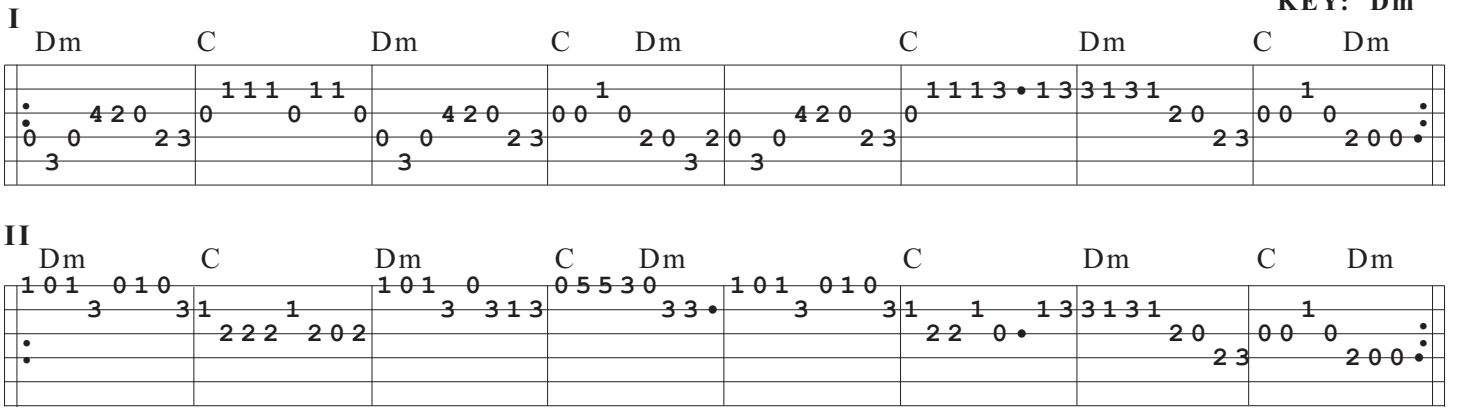


And, finally, *The Highway to Holburn*. This tune is played entirely in first position. Because it's in D minor, however, you'll find some unconventional fretting sequences. It all lays pretty naturally, however, so I offer it to you without further fanfare, muss, fuss and hubbub (which is, coincidentally, the name of Granger Publications' law firm).

THE HIGHWAY TO HOLBURN

Audio CD
Track 49

KEY: Dm



Again, on this tune, we fret a B note that could be played open, in the first, third and fifth measures. Oh yeah, and another thing: There are several places in this tune where we are presented with three unison notes (*i.e.* the ones in the second measure of the first part). The "authentic" Irish treatment of these figures is to add a note in between the second two notes to create an eighth note followed by a triplet of sixteenth notes. This changes the cadence of the figure from a three-note rhythm inflected like "potato"to a four-note rhythm inflected like "deliberate". The right hand traditionally would pick this "down-down-up-down". Have a go at it.

Okay planoplectrists everywhere, it's time to sign off. May the wanderlust infect you, and may it spawn adventures beyond description and belief. Until next time, I remain your obedient servant, Adam Granger.

Adam Granger also writes for A Prairie Home Companion. *Recent contributions include an ad for* Farm Shue *and a* Guy Noir *script involving a dame named Megan Whoopee.*

Non sequitur *freak accident: in 1973, Adam worked in a power plant. He was doing maintenance with a large power drill and got his long hair wrapped around the shaft. He lost half of his hair. His accident prompted a rule that all the hippies working at the power plant had to wear stocking caps while on duty.*

Exploring Bluegrass Guitar

Rating Yourself

by Steve Pottier

There are a couple of good reasons to rate yourself in your progression as a musician. First, if you attend a music camp, you may be asked either to rate yourself or select courses based on skill level (Flatpicking II is for intermediate to advanced players). How the heck are you supposed to know?? My experience at teaching camps is that students almost always over-estimate their skill level. Or perhaps my definitions may be too high? Anyway, there is really not a common reference that both teacher and student can use.

A second reason is to realistically, objectively stand back and think about what you can and cannot do, and what might be the next step to really focus on to move you from Beginner III to Intermediate I.

A few years ago, someone on one of the music lists suggested a 10 level skill evaluation scheme. I've tried without success to find it again, so I've come up with my own scheme based on that idea. Let's call it the "Flatpicking Guitar Skill Level Rating System," and I would welcome input from anyone on refining it. It is aimed specifically at bluegrass flatpickers.

Beginner
(Getting Up and Going)

1) Beginner I - Just Starting to Learn Guitar

Skills:
- Knows basic chords (G, C, D, A, E, Am, Em)
- Knows names of the open strings
- Can tune the guitar with an electronic tuner
- Can tap foot in time with a metronome

Listening:
- Start to build a library of music. At least five bluegrass records/CDs with at least two from Monroe/Flatt and Scruggs/Stanleys

Goals:
- Strum chords to a song or tune without breaking time
- Find a songbook (or internet site) as a source of songs

2) Beginner II- Adding Basic Techniques

Skills:
- Knows F chord, Dm chord
- Knows bass/strum (boom-chick) without up strums
- Can perform alternating bass note strum
- Knows hammer-on, pull-off, slides
- Can execute 2-, 3-, and 4-note bass runs to connect chord changes
- Can read tab

Goals:
- Bass strum at 60 bpm (one bass/strum per click)
- Find someone to jam with (one on one)

3) Beginner III- Into the Fray

Skills:
- Knows B7 chord
- Can perform Carter strum
- Understands use of a capo (including how to put it on and where to put it)
- Can handle 3/4 time

Goals:
- Play several leads Carter style (e.g., Wildwood Flower)
- Able to play rhythm in slow to moderate jams on songs you have practiced
- Play Bass/strum at 80 bpm (one bass/strum per click)
- Repertoire contains at least 10 tunes and 10 songs for which you have memorized the chord progressions and can play in a jam
- Able to play simple chord progressions in the keys of A, C, D, E, and G

Intermediate
(Starting Lead Playing)

4) Intermediate I- Beginning Fiddle Tunes

Skills:
- Can perform alternating pick stroke (DUDU)
- Can tune using a tuning fork
- Can memorize play simple arrangements of fiddle tunes from tab
- Knows notes in the G and C scales up to the 5th fret

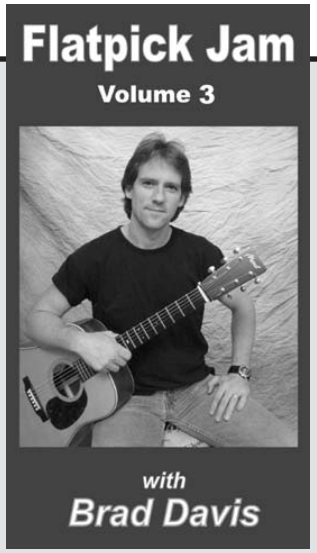
Goals:
- Memorize and play simple arrangements of fiddle tunes from tab
- Play a minimum of five common fiddle tunes played out of C and/or G position (e.g., "Billy In the Lowground," "Salt Creek")
- Can determine the key of a song on record
- Repertoire contains 20 tunes/ 20 songs
- Has a bag of tricks for simple kick offs in G and C

5) Intermediate II- Band Skills

Skills:
- Knows Nashville number system
- Can read/write chord charts
- Executes DUDU cross picking
- Executes rest stroke

Listening:
- Listen to some recordings in a concentrated, undistracted way, listening to individual instruments and voices and how they interact, how they change volume, where the G-runs are placed and not placed. Compare bands in this way. How does Jimmy Martin's rhythm differ from Lester Flatt? What does Tony Rice play behind his sing versus behind the banjo?
- Record collection now contains at least 25 records/CDs

Goals:
- Write the chord chart to five Stanley and five Monroe tunes
- Play "Beaumont Rag"
- Execute Lester Flatt 2 note G run using rest stroke
- Play rhythm at 120 bpm (one bass/strum per click)
- Has bag of tricks for ending songs in G and C, both rhythm and lead



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6) Intermediate III- Developing your ear and knowledge of the fretboard
Skills:
• Able to transcribe a guitar solo
• Able to transcribe a fiddle solo to guitar
• Can identify and play major triads on the first 3 strings
• Play melodic fragments from jingles to anything in your head
• Can tune to other instruments
Goals:
• Transcribe the chord progression of a song on record
• Repertoire contains 40 tunes/ 40 songs
• Play rhythm at 130 bpm (one bass/strum per click)
• Play "Happy Birthday" on command in any key
• Play leads consistently at 110 bpm

Advanced (Moving Towards Composing/Improvising)

7) Advanced I -Composing
Skills:
• Rest Stroke revisited; can execute Del McCoury and Jimmy Martin runs
• Can identify the actual melody of a song or fiddle tune
• Can transpose to another key
• Can transpose to another octave
• Executes double stops both adjacent string and split string (string between)
Goals:
• Compose a variation of a fiddle tune
• Compose a break to a song
• Incorporate more rest stroke runs in your rhythm
• Compose a break to a song in two different octaves
• Compose a break to a song in two different keys
Listening:
• Record collection now contains at least 75 records/CDs/live tapes

8) Advanced II -Improvising
Skills:
• Executes DDU and/or DUU crosspicking
Goals:
• Improvise a break to something you've never played
• Play eighth note leads consistently at 130 bpm

9) Advanced III -Advanced Improvising
Skills:
• Can execute patternless crosspicking
• Able to improvise to more complex chord patterns/melodies
Goals
• Play rhythm at 150 bpm (one bass/strum per click)
• Improvise a break to something you've never played incorporating the melody
• Play eighth note leads consistently at 140 bpm
• Play breaks that are not all eighth notes
• Repertoire contains 80 tunes/100+ songs
• Compose an original tune

Professional (Band Savvy, Focus On Tone, Re-Evaluation)

10) Professional

The professional level is distinguished by a more focused awareness and attentiveness to tone production and timing, as well as appropriateness of the playing to the overall song in both rhythm and lead (the famous three Ts). There is also an awareness of presentation (showmanship), mike technique, and performance responsibilities. These are all things that I've often heard discussed in detail by the highest echelon of bluegrass musicians, almost to the point of obsession, and not heard very much in discussions with lower level players. I think the big hint here is that in trying to articulate these points, you increase your awareness of them, and awareness is step one to change and improvement.

This level includes present day players such as Doc Watson, Tony Rice, Kenny Smith, David Grier, Tim Stafford, Larry Sparks, Dudley Connell, and Del McCoury (to name a few, in no particular order).

To place yourself at a given level, you would have the skills and accomplished the goals for that level and all levels below it. This means that if you can play rhythm at 130 bpm (Intermediate III) but are unclear on the capo concept (Beginner III) then you are a Beginner II. I tried to arrange the progression with some sense of building on previous levels but being at one level does not limit you from reaching for skills and goals at a higher level. Conversely, completing a given level does mean you shouldn't go back and review even the most basic skills in Beginner I. The advancing player will always look to improve those skills with newly acquired awareness and experience. Finally, keep in mind that this is only a guide, not a course set in stone. Have fun with it, and feel free to email me with any comments. If there are enough suggestions/changes, I'll incorporate them into a future column.

John McGann's Eclectic Acoustic

Strong Fundamentals #3: Timing

This month, rather than presenting any printed music, I'd like to direct you to the audio CD to listen to ideas for developing strong timing. Whether you are brand new to the guitar or an experienced pro, this kind of work on the fundamentals will be beneficial. Good timing can deliver the most simple phrase with the most impact. The most intricate idea played with less-than-good timing will just sound substandard.

I picked "Old Joe Clark" capoed at the second fret, as an example. It's a common tune all flatpickers should know.

All the examples are played with the metronome clicking on beats two and four, like a mandolin. The tempos used are (half note equals) 84, 100, 120, and 144. The fastest tempo (144) translates to 288 beats per minute, which just starts to approach the up-tempo playing you'll hear from Monroe or Flatt and Scruggs (which could climb to well over 300 beats per minute).

In all rhythm playing, clearly "laying it down"—making the beat as clear as possible—is crucial. Be careful that any additional texture doesn't obscure the basic groove. If you play in a band, getting everyone to work with the metronome at home as well as in band rehearsals will quickly tighten up your sound. Another essential band ideal is to have everyone agree to listen at all times, which builds awareness of the time and dynamics (volume).

Practicing rhythm playing (as well as lead) with the metronome is a great way to maintain a strong pulse. If it's good enough for Tony Rice, Doyle Lawson, and Tony Trischka (to name a few great players who use the metronome), it's good enough for me!

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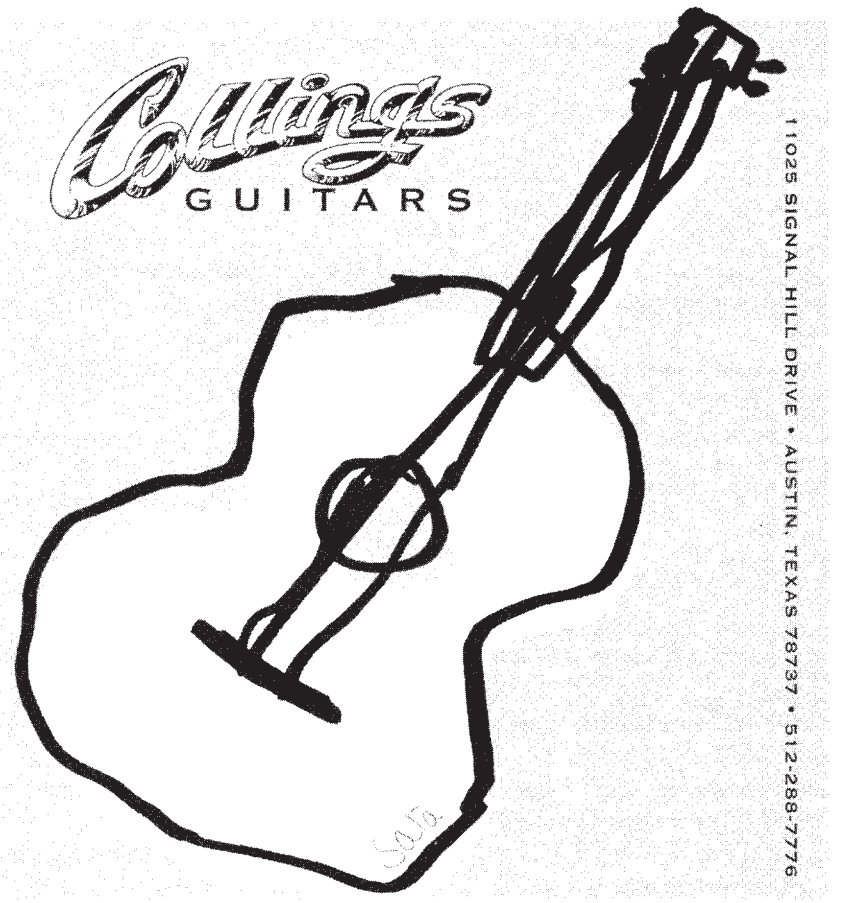

New Release Highlight
Tab Book Review: Contest Winners by Scott Fore

by Dan Miller

In this issue's "New Release Highlight" column we are doing something a little different. In previous issues we have always presented a new CD release in this column, however, in this issue we are going to talk about a new tab book/CD package that has been produced by the reigning National Flatpicking Champion Scott Fore. The book is titled *Contest Winners: Winning Contest Arrangements*. Since Scott has not only won the national championship, but just about every other major guitar contest in the country (Merlefest, Galax, Henderson, Renofest, etc.) there is no reason to question the book's authority.

If you are interested in contest style playing and would like to learn about how a contest champion arranges tunes for contest play, this is the best resource you could have. Because these tunes are the exact contest arrangements Scott has used in the various contests he has won, the

Contest Winners
Twelve Winning Guitar Arrangements
Note for Note Transcriptions with Rhythm CD
Arranged by Scott Fore
National Flatpicking Champion

arrangements here are not for the beginner. Even intermediate level players are going to have a tough time getting through these tunes. Advanced players may be able to get through the arrangements, but playing them at contest speeds will be a challenge.

The songs that Scott transcribes here (and plays on the accompanying CD) are:
Angline the Baker, Bill Cheatem, Beaumont Rag, Ragtime Annie, Blackberry Blossom, St. Anne's Reel, Cluck Old Hen, Whiskey Before Breakfast, Red Haired Boy, and Alabama Jubilee. As you can see, they are all great flatpicking standards.

In the book Scott presents a page of performance notes for each song, and then gives the complete contest arrangement in both standard music notation and tablature. For each tune Scott provides numerous arrangements (anywhere from 4 to 6 complete variations), he plays each complete arrangement on the audio CD, and then provides a separate rhythm track on the audio CD so that you can have a back-up track to practice with. It is a very compete and thorough coverage of this material and is presented in an easily readable format. If you are looking for some arrangements to standard flatpicking tunes that will really challenge you and provide you with a great many arrangement ideas, this book is for you. Additionally, it is a fantastic resource for anyone who is entering contests. Time and time again we have interviewed players in this magazine who say, "The first time I went to Winfield, I really didn't know what to expect." With Scott Fore's *Contest Winners* now on the market, there is no reason that anyone should have to enter a contest and not know what to expect. This book is the contest player's primer.

In this issue we provide you with Scott's arrangement of "Alabama Jubilee" as it appears in his book. In order to conserve space we have not provided the complete arrangement here in the magazine. The entire arrangement, and the rhythm track, appears on the audio CD, however, we only provide you with transcriptions of the first two sections of the tune on the following pages.

Here are Scott's performance notes on the first two sections of this tune:

"This tune, along with Ragtime Annie, is the one that I can always count on to place me in competitions. I used every technique except harmonics in this arrangement. I also normally play this tune at a tempo of 140+ when I compete.

This tune will require the guitarist to have a highly developed right hand technique, especially when playing at the faster tempos. It also works at slower tempos.

The song kicks off with the turnaround and goes straightforward, and it is not until you get to the second break that things get harder. The second break is crosspicked and there is a lot of string skipping. Let the strings ring as long as possible to give a fuller sound. The lick at measure 28 is an intervallic type of lick. I borrowed the idea from jazz saxophonists. The main thing to remember is to play from chord positions. These may be new chord shapes for some, but they are the chords with added extensions none the less."

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Audio CD
Track 56-57

Alabama Jubilee

Arranged by Scott Fore

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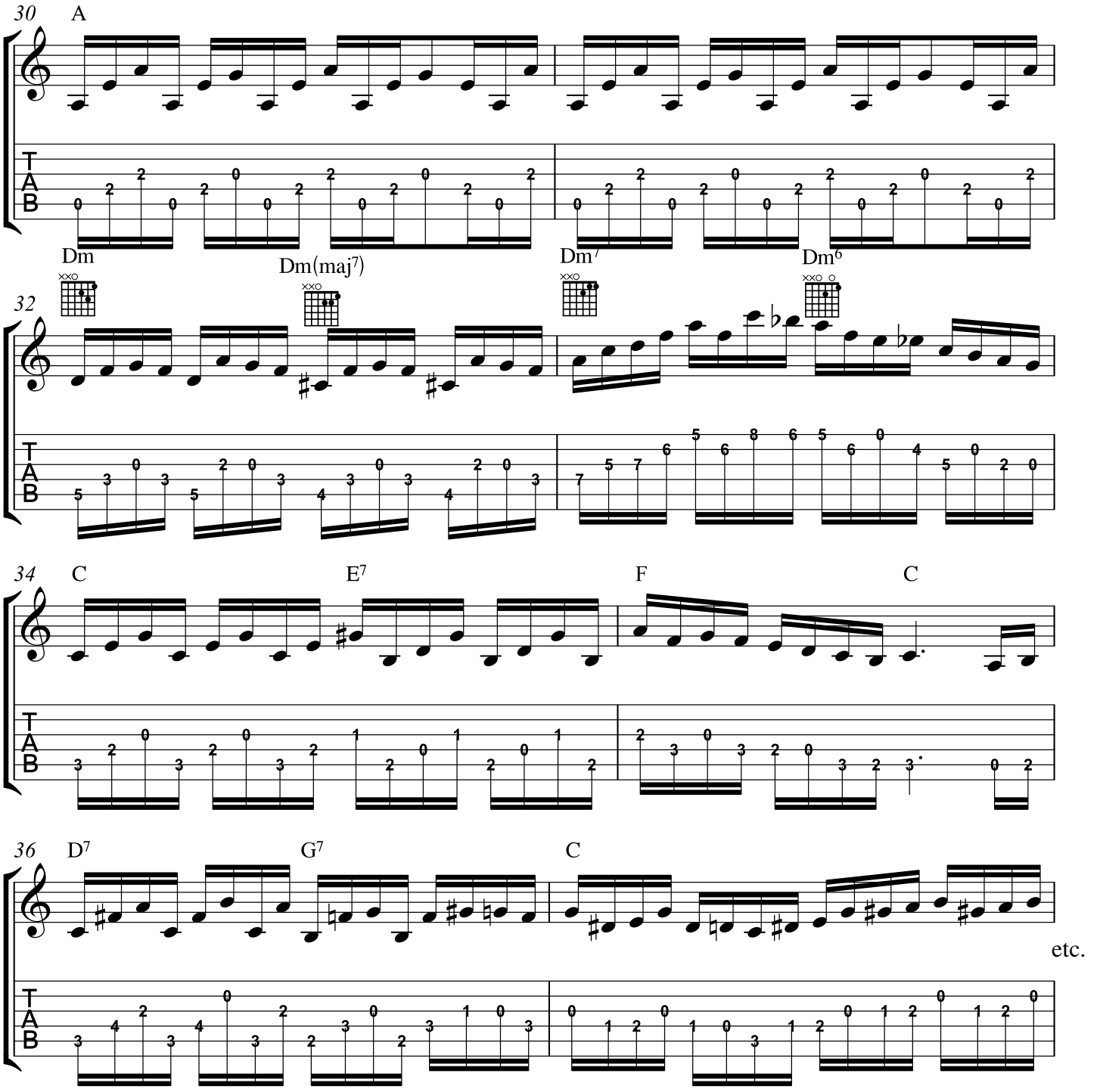
Alabama Jubilee (con't)



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Reviews

Larry Sparks
The Coldest Part of Winter

Reviewed by Chris Thiessen

There's already been many biographic articles (including an FGM cover story for the May/June 1998 issue) about Larry Sparks. Suffice it to say that he's been a major force in bluegrass since he stepped into Carter Stanley's shoes 40 years ago, and then later branching out from those high-profile beginnings with his Lonesome Ramblers.

His latest CD, *The Coldest Part of Winter*, extends that reputation. As Marty Godbey's liner notes indicate, Sparks selected eleven new songs "…that haven't been done to death." That pallet includes three tunes from the pen of Merlefest songwriting winner David Norris ("Our Old Home," "This Old Road," and "He Walked All the Way Home"), five Marshal Warwick tunes, and one from Larry Sparks (a gospel number, "Lord, Show Me the Way"). Mandolinist Scott Napier contributes a new instrumental "Parkway Blues" (to balance the classic "Soldier's Joy"), and Marvin Harlow's ballad "Shenandoah Moon" round out the even dozen.

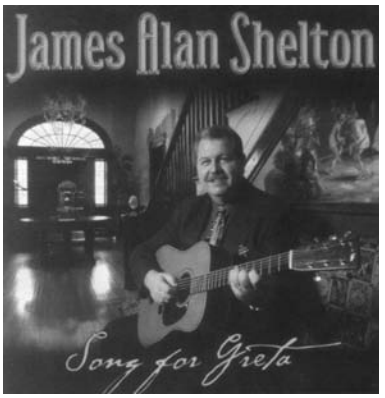
Each of these tunes provides a platform for Larry to express his unique brand of bluegrass. Even with a tune like "Winter in Miami" (a city not normally associated with bluegrass), Sparks leverages his soulful baritone and passionate phrasings to come up with the tagline for the CD: "…the coldest part of winter is goodbye." The CD's opening tune, "Leavin' Me" calls up a classic bluegrass theme, wound tight with a hard-driving banjo and fiddle interchange (provided by Josh McMurray and Michael Cleveland, respectively).

Sparks' selection of three tunes from David Norris is of special interest. I first encountered "He Walked All the Way Home" on a Blue Highway CD. Sparks' version is very different, somehow more plaintive, but is very much in line with the other two selections from Norris ("This Old Road" and "Our Old Home"), which reminisce on the daily pleasures of a simpler life in an earlier time. That's a recurring Sparks theme as well. "You Ain't Lived," "Turn Back the Clock," and "Kentucky Moon" (all written by Marshal Warwick) provide that same wistful looking-back-at-the-past view.

But whatever your opinion may be on the relative merits of bluegrass lyrics, the musicians accompanying Sparks on this CD are tight and well-synchronized with Larry's bluegrass vision. The two instrumentals ("Parkway Blues" and "Soldier's Joy") provide all the requisite bluegrass chops you could desire. And Larry Sparks demonstrates his master of rhythm guitar throughout, as in the openings to "You Ain't Lived" or "This Old Road," as well as providing a bit of his own flatpicking flash on "Soldier's Joy."

Song List: Leavin' Me; You Ain't Lived; This Old Road; Winter in Miami; Parkway Blues; Let's Turn Back the Clock; Kentucky Moon; He Walked All the Way Home; Our Old Home; Shenandoah Moon; Soldier's Joy; Lord, Show Me the Way

James Alan Shelton
Song for Greta



Reviewed by Chris Thiessen

Lately I've been listening to a number of hot flatpickers (most of them irritatingly very young), and a steady diet of tunes at 300bpm is an exhausting process. So I was delighted to slip James Alan Shelton's CD *Song for Greta* into the player. It's an immensely relaxing, mostly instrumental CD, with a great balance of medium-fast and slower tunes. For me, the initial listening was a perfect compliment to early morning coffee while sitting out on the screened porch on a warm spring day.

Currently lead guitarist with Ralph Stanley's Clinch Mountain Boys, Shelton draws some of his friends (Tim Stafford, Gillian Welch and David Rawlings) as well as the Clinch Mountain Boys into this project. The result is a CD that grows on you, and reveals its delights with repeated listenings.

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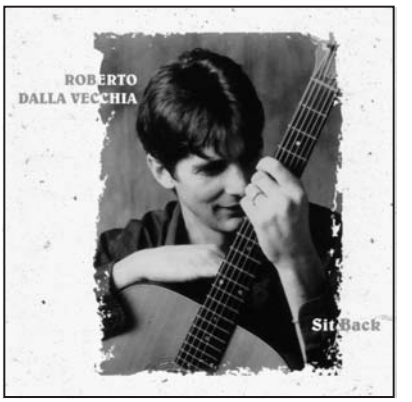
Tim Stafford joins with Shelton to set the pace for the CD with Shelton's "North Fork of the Holston": a measured tempo that moves the tune along, but gives each guitarist a chance to shine. After the CD's title tune (named for his wife), Gillian Welch and David Rawlings join James for a crisp rendition of the Carter Family's "Fifty Miles of Elbow Room." An interesting aspect of this CD is how Shelton stirs tunes together: "Scarborough Fair" (another Stafford-Shelton duo) is bracketed by Monroe's "The Sunset Trail" and "Back Up and Push," or Elizabeth Cotten's "Freight Train" is sandwiched between "Down Yonder" and "Long Journey Home." At first what seemed an arbitrary mixing bothered me, until I began to realize that each tune showcases a different component of Shelton's musical abilities. And of course there's the required (and almost patented) Shelton crosspicking showing up in almost every tune.

Although I'm not a devoted Stanley fan, I really liked Shelton's lead on "Long Journey Home." (In fact, it jumped to the top of my list of leads to transcribe.). It's tasteful and appropriate without a lot of extra notes, and that brings us back full circle to those pesky 300bpm flatpicking firebrands: the issues of taste and appropriateness. Shelton's great strength—as both a guitarist and a performer—is his knowledge of what constitutes a pleasing tune. Go back and listen carefully to the guitar work on "Fifty Miles of Elbow Room": there's an astonishing grasp of the appropriate level of music that should accompany a Carter Family tune. Same thing with "Shady Grove": it's been done to death at various speeds, but Shelton's combination of leisurely pacing, subtle background guitar with a bit of well-placed crosspicking, and some assistance from the Clinch Mountain Boys, gives this tune new life.

If there's a weak point on the CD, it was in the vocals: I'd have liked to hear James sing a couple more tunes. But there's another hallmark of the savvy professional entertainer: leave the audience wanting more. I'll just have to wait until the next CD (or perhaps Merlefest…).

Song List: North Fork of the Holston; Song for Greta; Fifty Miles of Elbow Room; Faded Love; The Sunset Trail; Scarborough Fair; Back Up and Push; Shady Grove; When You and I Were Young; Maggie; It Is Better Farther On; Down Yonder; Freight Train; Long Journey Home.

Roberto Dalla Vecchia:
Sit Back



Reviewed by Chris Thiessen

Okay. I'm a stupid American who thought that only Americans flatpicked guitar. But then this guy from Italy—Beppe Gambetta—shows up. Okay. "A fluke," I thought. Uh, that would be wrong. Roberto Dalla Vecchia is another monster talent from Italy. I was stunned the first time I listened to his CD, *Sit Back*. It's aptly named: I just sat back. I have never heard 36 minutes of music go by so quickly!

First, Della Vecchia has a mastery over tone and a grasp for sound quality that is positively awesome. And coming

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from across the pond, he's not bound by the strictures we on this side sometimes place on ourselves. Many of his tunes are alternate tunings (detailed in the liner notes), and on two tunes ("Whispering Grove" and "Sultry Day") he's got a cello accompanist, and on two others ("Sultry Night" and "Fly High") he's got a bassist playing with him. There is some very serious musical artistry going on here, but artistry that is immensely listenable.

Of course, not all his tunes are "familiar favorites." There's a good reason for that, as well. With the exception of a deliciously slow version of "Fisher's Hornpipe/Scotland," 9 of the 10 cuts on this CD are Dalla Vecchia originals.

No, this is not a "flatpicking bluegrass guitar" CD. It's acoustic guitar music—and superb acoustic guitar music at that, with the same jaw-dropping sheer artistic expertise that the Grisman Quintet or Leo Kottke exhibited when they first appeared. And this is Roberto Dalla Vecchia's second CD.

Finally, for the sake of my ego as a flatpicker, I hope there are only two of these guys. These Italian flatpickers are just scary! This CD—if you can find it—is a absolute must buy!

Song List: Trust Your Instincts; Fisher's Hornpipe/Scotland; Whispering Grove; Two Lovers in the Snow; Duck Dance; Sultry Night; Cascade; Sultry Day; Fly High; Alison

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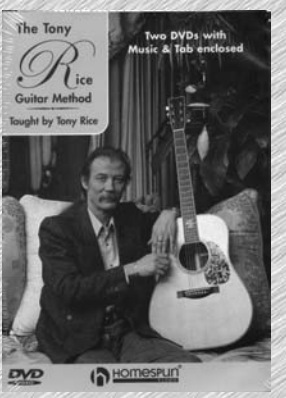

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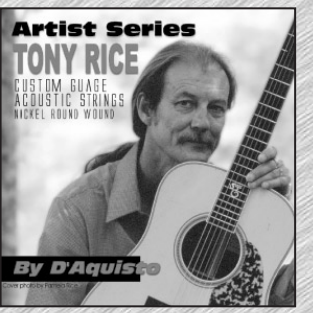

Product Reviews

Wegen Picks –
Revolutionizing the Flatpick
by David McCarty

It's probably an overstatement to say that Dutch mechanical engineer and precision model maker Michel Wegen has reinvented the simple flatpick. But using his engineering insights, passion for mechanical precision, and input from some of the world's leading flatpickers and Gypsy jazz guitarists, Wegen has certainly created a product that in many ways is a revolutionary step beyond the simple plastic or shell plectrum used by most flatpickers.

His quest for the perfect pick started several years ago in his native Holland, a hotbed of Gypsy jazz guitar. Several guitar-playing friends approached Wegen, (who does not play guitar) to see if he could help solve the problems they had with the picks they were using. The Gypsy jazz style of guitar pioneered by Django Reinhardt typically employs a thick, rigid pick, often of natural tortoiseshell. European guitarists have even more trouble finding useable shell picks than we do in the U.S., and few players had the skill to craft a pick with a suitable bevel that would allow the thick plectrum to slide on and off the string smoothly during rapid-fire Django runs.

Wegen investigated a number of synthetic materials as replacements for natural shell and settled on a machineable compound he refuses to identify, only saying it includes aramid fibers similar to Kevlar. He then developed the tooling necessary to saw pick blanks and shape them into useable flatpicks with precision ground bevels on the picking edges.

His first picks were massive behemoths ranging from 3.5 to a stunning 5.0 mm in thickness. The picks, called the Gypsy Jazz Pick (GP) and Fattone respectively, were so thick he carved grooved thumb and finger recesses into each side so they could be held more securely.

Those picks gained instant popularity within the Gypsy swing community. As word of the new picks reached US shores, he began selling picks here to guitarists who most often had come to Gypsy jazz guitar via bluegrass. Those players were used to thinner plectra, and asked Wegen to produce picks that ranged from 1.0 to 1.4 mm in the same durable, stiff synthetic material with his precision bevel.

As FLATPICK-L list subscribers already know, the picks have been enormously successful, generating tremendous response on the list and capturing some of the top flatpickers as loyal Wegen customers. Not everyone is ready to give up their shell or Clayton gold picks, but now that an outstanding, well-engineered alternative has appeared, many flatpickers have been curious.

Recently, Wegen has introduced several new models and has added black as an alternative to the original white-colored material. The Gypsy Jazz Picks are now available in both 2.5 and 3.5 mm thickness (GP 250 and GP 350). Personally, I love the GP 250 for lead work on my Selmer-style Dell'Arte Manouche. There's also a new, smaller version of the Gypsy Jazz Pick called the Twin that may appeal to players with smaller hands or who prefer small picks.

A huge rhythm guitar pick, the Trimus, also will appeal to anyone playing Gypsy jazz style guitar. These triangular picks have a deep, grooved recess in the center, and have three useable points, all carefully beveled for optimal playability. (Note: All Wegen picks are beveled for right-handed players, but can be ordered for left-handed use.) The Trimus picks also are available in 2.5, 3.5 and 5.0 mm.

For bluegrass players who prefer a tri-cornered pick, Wegen has created a triangular pick with seven holes in the center for increased grip (picks can be ordered without holes, if preferred). These TF model picks are available in 1.0, 1.2 and 1.4 mm thicknesses

A standard teardrop-shaped pick, the Bluegrass Pick, comes in roughly a 1.4 mm thickness and also has nine holes drilled to reduce pick slippage. Again, you can contact Michel directly via his website to order custom picks in different gauges or to request a completely custom shape.

For players who use a mandolin-style rounded pick like the popular "Dawg" model inspired by David Grisman, Wegen offers two thicknesses: the M100 and M150. These picks have no holes and come in either black or white.

For straight-up jazz players, there's also a very interesting small teardrop pick with holes called the Big City Pick that I've found to work very nicely as an all-around Gypsy jazz pick.

Wegen picks are not cheap. You'll pay anything from $15 for a package of four bluegrass picks to $25 for a pack of two Gypsy Jazz Picks. But considering the tremendous durability of the material (my picks show essentially zero wear despite hours of use), the superb bevel that really helps get the pick in and out of the string smoothly, and the broad range of standard shapes and thicknesses, these picks definitely deserve a close inspection by serious guitarists of all stripes.

For more information, visit the Wegen website at www.wegenpicks.com or visit his main U.S. dealer at www.bigcitystrings.com. Look for Wegen picks also at Elderly Instruments, *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine's* Flatpicking Mercantile and other domestic sources.

Schertler Bluestick
Review By Scott Fore

As with most guitarists, I am always on the lookout for new and better sounding products that make my life easier. My search for a pickup system led me through the myriad of products designed to amplify my guitar, but I didn't hear anything that would compel me to drill holes in my acoustic guitars until I heard the Schertler Bluestick on the Cabin Stage at Merlefest last year. As someone who has gone

through lots of gear in search of that elusive sound, I was skeptical of their claims. I wanted something that sounded like my guitar and was easy to use without having to carry a rack full of outboard gear. I wanted to plug and play! The pickup sounded good in the D-28 at their booth, but I've learned that I needed to hear it on stage through the PA to really know if it was going to work for me. I watched as the guitarist plugged the guitar into a DI (no external EQs, preamps, blenders, or other gadgets) and began to play. It sounded like a D-28 through a good condenser microphone! I was sold. I ordered three the next day, and have been extremely happy with the pickup.

Just what is a Bluestick? The Bluestick from Schertler is a subminiature condenser microphone that is attached to a hollow chamber—the "stick"—that sits under the saddle. The stick is 1/32" thick and weighs practically nothing. Unlike a piezo (which requires string pressure), the Bluestick only requires even contact with the saddle. This allows you to use any string gauge or tuning without affecting the sound. I also found that my guitars actually sounded better acoustically after installing the Bluestick. The signal from the microphone goes to a class "A" preamp that is mounted with Velcro to the inside back of the guitar. There is also a gain wheel that mounts to the underside of the top around the sound hole. Installation is fairly simple. You drill two holes in the guitar: one under the saddle in the center of the slot, and the other on the end of the guitar for the endpin jack. No soldering is required due to the ingenious clamping system on the preamp. This feature, combined with the preamp's Velcro attachment, makes any future servicing of the preamp or changing the batteries very easy. The Bluestick offers up to 10db more gain before feedback over traditional piezo undersaddle pickups. In my experience with the Bluestick, I have been able to get all the stage volume I want and then some without any hint of feedback.

The first thing I noticed about the Bluestick-equipped guitar was that my guitar sounded like my guitar, only louder. I also noticed that I didn't have to alter my playing style to fit the pickup, and the pickup allowed me to use all the dynamics I would normally use when playing. Another thing I liked was the fact that I could plug into a DI and tell the soundman to set the board EQ flat and turn me up. I no longer had to spend time "dialing in" my sound.

At $195 list, I found the Bluestick to also be less expensive because I no longer needed to purchase external gadgets to help me get a good sound…and it's plug and play. As the Schertler Bluestick is now offered as standard equipment in some Martin, Gibson, and Santa Cruz guitars, as well as other manufacturers models, it's easier to get out and test drive one for yourself. I think you'll like it!

UltraSound AG-50DS2 Acoustic Guitar Amplifier

Reviewed by Scott Fore

The AG-50DS2 amplifier from Ultrasound is designed for acoustic guitarists. The amp includes two channels, a microphone channel and a guitar input channel. The amplifier also includes a set of digital effects that are powered by an Alesis chip.

The first thing I noticed about the amp was its weight: a very light 23.7 pounds, which I appreciated when carrying the amp from the car to the gig. The amp has a mic channel control (XLR type input), bass control, treble control, and a level control. The guitar channel has a guitar input, a send control (which provides an unbalanced input from the preamp), return control, effects level control, effects mode rotary knob, level control (to adjust the preamp gain), bass control, treble control, notch filter control, shape control, and a master volume control. The rear panel outputs consist of a mono line out, stereo line out, headphones line out, and an XLR output. There was also a detachable power chord. After surveying the controls, I plugged in a Bluestick-equipped guitar and started to play, since I wanted to see if the amp was easy to operate without reading the manual. The amp sounded very nice and all of the controls did as their name suggested. The guitar sounded full and acoustic through the amp. The dome tweeters were a very nice departure from the harsh sounding horns sometimes found on other acoustic amplifiers. This amplifier was the 50 watt model and stayed clean when I cranked up the volume. The amp had plenty of volume to be heard on stage. I also ran a line from the XLR out to a house system; the resulting sound was full and very clean.

As the Bluestick-equipped guitar doesn't tend to feedback, I was able to crank the amp to its full volume without a hint of feedback, even with the guitar's sound hole directly in front of the speakers. I also tested the notch filter control and shape control by plugging a piezo-equipped Taylor into the amp, and I was able to effectively dial out the feedback frequency. I strolled through the effects contained in the amp, which (as I said earlier) are powered by an Alesis chip. Several of the reverbs were nice and helped to add a little depth to the sound. I prefer to add effects pedals for chorusing and delay effects, which can be switched in an out as I wish, and the effects loop in the AG-50DS2 allowed me to do this. If I had my wish, I would have preferred a true bypass switch for the onboard effects, but rolling the effects level to zero also let me remove the effects.

One last addition to the amplifier was the little handle on the bottom. It acted as a prop, enabling the amplifier to lean back at an angle and letting the guitarist hear better on stage.

If you are in the market for a good amplifier for your acoustic guitar pickup, the AG-50DS2 would be a good choice. The feature-loaded amplifier has nearly everything you would want—light weight, small size, good tone, multiple connection capabilities, controls for busting unwanted feedback frequencies, multiple output connections to meet a variety of situations, onboard effects, and enough power to handle most every situation.

Listing at $650 (with "street" prices as low as $480), it would be worth heading down to your local dealer and giving it a listen.

Guitar Review: The Taylor 810 Re-voiced Dreadnought

By Kevin Stevenson

Two years ago the Taylor Guitar Company introduced a revolutionary new way to attach a neck to an acoustic guitar. At a demonstration of this "new technology" neck, I asked Bob Taylor a straightforward question. His answer surprised me, confused me, and even shocked me. I simply asked Bob how this new way of securing the neck to the body would affect the tone of the guitar.

"Well, basically," said Bob, in a carefully worded response, "I have chosen not to compete in the arena of tone." What?? A guitar builder that doesn't care about tone? I listened as he explained this perplexing comment.

"Tone is a subjective thing, you like it or you don't. Our tone is what our tone is, and frankly a lot of people really like the Taylor tone. But I'm not in the business of "chasing tone." I'm more interested in solving the measurable and objective problems of guitar building. Is the neck angle right? Is the intonation accurate? Is the action good? These are things that can be measured, and the NT neck design is about solving these objective issues in every guitar we make, over and over again."

Apparently the new neck design, along with it's improvements in Taylor's guitar building process, has finally resolved a good many of the measurable, objective issues that haunt the high volume manufacturing of fine quality guitars. Bob Taylor and his team of world class experts are now actively concerned with acoustic guitar tone, and in how that tone is amplified from a stage (stay tuned for news on the "Expression System," Taylor's new pickup and preamplifier combination, featuring electronic components designed by pro audio legend, Rupert Neve).

The "re-voiced" Dreadnought

It's probably not news to the readers of this particular magazine that the Taylor dreadnought has never been king of the hill in bluegrass and flatpicking circles. A recent head count at the Winfield festival revealed that only three of the forty players

in the National Championship flatpick contest used Taylors, while 23 of the 40 fingerstyle players (including the first place winner) were playing Taylor Grand Auditorium or Grand Concert models. The Taylor line of dreadnoughts has always had a distinctive tone, but not the deep, booming bass of Martin's old war-horse, the D-28 and D-18. Other builders have successfully chased down that vintage tone by faithfully recreating the old Martin design in the smallest detail. That old Martin tone seems to be the Holy Grail and many builders and players have sought it out passionately, but not Taylor. (It's interesting that Bob Taylor had already embarked on his career as a guitar builder and designer before he ever got his hands on a Martin dreadnought. The Martin tone wasn't even on his radar until he was well into the trade of building guitars. In fact, one of the unique distinctives of Taylor's story, compared with other luthiers, is the lack of influence of the ubiquitous Martin design.)

The news to report here is that the Taylor Dreadnought guitars have been "re-voiced." A modified bracing pattern with the X brace shifted slightly forward and a patented new process of thinning the top of the guitar around the edge has produced a new Taylor Dreadnought that is an entirely different animal from the Taylor Dreads of the past. This is truly a remarkable guitar.

The guitar loaned to me by Taylor for this review is 810, an Indian rosewood beauty with an Engelmann spruce top. The back of the guitar has a flame of reddish color in the grain that is bookmatched on the other side, of course, with the same reddish feature matching in the sides. The workmanship is simply perfect! There is no glue at all used in the neck joint, and I'm amazed at how precise a fit is achieved where the soundboard meets the top. Taylor's new necks are assembled from three pieces (the headstock and neck shaft are actually cut from the same piece of wood, then milled separately and re-joined) with joints at the heel and below the nut at the headstock. In my review of the Liberty Tree Guitar (June/July 2002) I noted the zigzag joint at the headstock. On this 810, however, both of the joints were almost invisible. If I were not aware of the neck's construction, I would have assumed the neck was all one piece of wood.

O.K., it's a beautiful piece of woodcraft, but how does it sound? I was able to conduct an extensive taste test with several "holy grail" Dreadnoughts in my arsenal, over several weeks. These included a Collings D-2H, a 70's Gallagher, a 1949 Martin D-18 and the Dan Crary Signature Model

Taylor that I bought from Dan at Flatpick Kamp a few years back. Everything got a new set of strings, and I was able to swap back and forth at will.

By comparison to these other guitars the new Taylor 810 is loud. Most of the comments I received suggested that the Taylor was louder than all these other guitars, except the Collings, and about the same as it. This new Taylor also has a big low end. If you hammer on that low sixth string from F# to G, it just growls. Still the voices of the inner strings remain very distinct and crisp. It has what I've heard called a dry sound. For what it's worth, I found myself breaking strings, (which I seldom do) on the new Taylor. I believe this was because this guitar wants to be played hard! It sounds good with a stiff attack, like hitting the top strings real hard, without the tone breaking up. It's as if the guitar gives you permission to play it louder!

I also compared it to some fingerstyle guitars, and found it to be a delightful, and crisp sound. Along with the enhanced volume comes loads of sustain, making "floaty" type runs, and DADGAD harp like licks sound especially full.

Everyone's tastes are different, and of course at the level of guitars in this price range it's hard to say one is better than the other, but they are all have distinctively different tones. If the luthiers at Taylor set out to reshape the sound of their dreadnoughts, then they have succeeded. This guitar truly is a different beast than the previous Dreadnoughts from Taylor. All Taylor Dreadnoughts from the 500 Series on up have the new bracing. If you're a player interested in the ultimate bluegrass cannon, then you'll need to seek out one of these re-voiced Taylor Dreadnought guitars for your own comparison.

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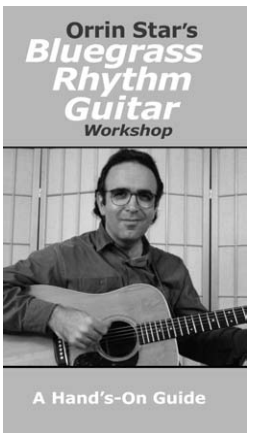

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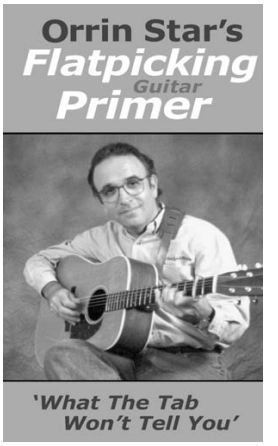

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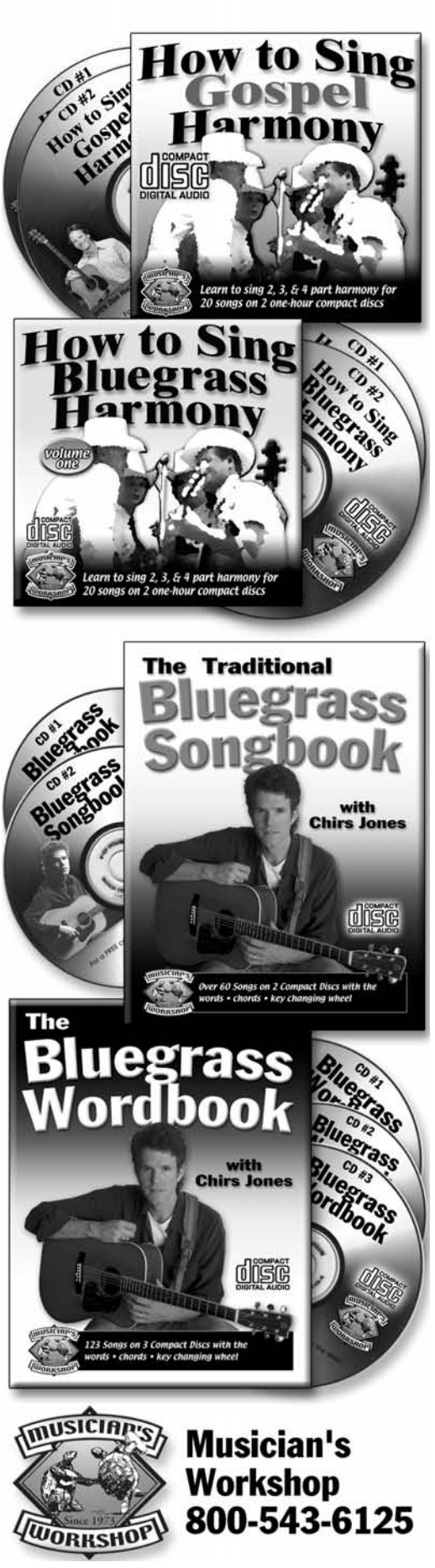
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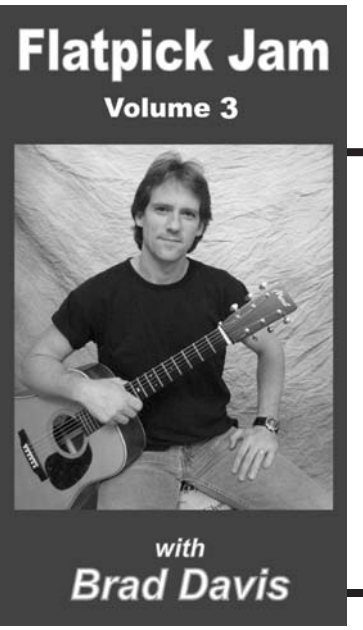

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